**General Assembly 3**

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**The question of protecting the rights of refugee children**

*Introduction*

Refugee children are minors who have been forced to flee their home countries due to persecution, conflict, violence, or other grave threats to their safety and well-being. They have left their home country and sought refuge in another nation or are internally displaced within their own country.

At the end of 2022, of the 108.4 million forcibly displaced people, an estimated 43.3 million (40 per cent) are children below 18 years of age.

Refugee children come from various countries, and the primary countries of origin can change over time due to conflicts, disasters, and other factors. In 2022, some of the countries with significant numbers of refugee children included Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, and Venezuela.

These children were forced to flee their homes due to conflicts, persecution, or environmental disasters.

Refugee children face unique vulnerabilities and challenges in host countries such as separation from family, lack of access to education and healthcare, exploitation, and abuse.

Protecting the rights of refugee children is not only a matter of basic human decency but also one of global importance. Failing to do so can have severe consequences, not just for the children themselves but for the stability and well-being of the world as a whole.

It is essential upon governments, international organizations, and civil society to work together to ensure that these rights are upheld and that refugee children are given the opportunities and support they need to thrive.

*International acts and conventions related to refugee children's rights.*

Some of the key frameworks and conventions designed to protect and promote the well-being of refugee children:

**1. 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol:** These define who qualifies as a refugee and outline their rights, including the right to non-refoulement (not to be returned to a country where they face persecution).

**2. 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):** The CRC covers issues such as education, health, protection from violence, and the right to be heard for all children, including refugee children.

**3. 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):** Protects the civil and political rights of refugees, including their right to liberty and security of person.

**4. Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Children:** Issued by the UNHCR, these guidelines offer practical guidance for ensuring the protection, education, healthcare, and family unity of refugee children.

**5. Guidelines on the Detention of Children in the Context of International Migration:** Also issued by the UNHCR, these guidelines provide recommendations to prevent the detention of children and offer alternatives when necessary.

*Issues that affect refugee children across the globe*

Child labor, child trafficking, and child marriage are grave issues that affect children globally, including refugee children. These problems can have severe and long-lasting impacts on the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of these vulnerable children.

**1. Child Labor:** Child labor refers to the exploitative employment of children in work that is harmful to their physical and mental development. Refugee children are often at a higher risk of being involved in child labor due to their displacement, limited access to education, and economic vulnerabilities. Child labor can expose them to hazardous conditions, long working hours, and low pay.

**2. Child Trafficking:** Child trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of children for exploitation. Refugee children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking due to their lack of legal protection and the chaos associated with displacement.

**3. Child Marriage:** Child marriage involves the marriage of individuals under the age of 18. Refugee children, especially girls, can be forced into early marriages due to cultural practices, economic pressures, or the belief that marriage provides protection in a challenging environment. Child marriage can have severe consequences for the physical and emotional well-being of these children.

*Addressing such issues for refugee children requires a multi-faceted approach that considers the unique challenges and vulnerabilities they face in displaced situations. And to do so, it is essential to:*

**1.Provide Access to Education:** Ensure that refugee children have access to quality education, as it not only empowers them but also reduces the likelihood of their involvement in child labor and early marriage.

**2.Strengthen Child Protection Mechanisms:** Develop and enforce legal frameworks to protect refugee children from child labor, trafficking, and marriage. This includes monitoring and reporting mechanisms and support services for victims.

**3.Support Economic Empowerment:** Provide vocational training and support programs to help refugee families achieve financial stability without resorting to child labor.

**4.Collaboration:** Encourage international cooperation and coordination among governments, NGOs, and international organizations to address these issues effectively, through financial donations to host countries as well as healthcare, education, and rehabilitation services

*The role of NGOs, UN agencies, and governments in ensuring protection for refugee children.*

**1.NGOs:** NGOs, often working on the ground in refugee-hosting countries, provide vital support and services to child refugees. Their roles include:

* Direct Services: services like shelter, food, healthcare, and education to child refugees. They may also provide psychosocial support and counseling to help children cope with trauma.
* Advocacy and Awareness: NGOs raise awareness about the plight of child refugees and advocate for their rights. They work to ensure that governments and international bodies fulfill their obligations under international law.
* Monitoring and Reporting: NGOs often act as watchdogs, monitoring conditions in refugee camps and detention centers, and reporting any violations or abuse to relevant authorities and the media.
* Capacity Building: NGOs may work to build the capacity of local organizations and communities to better support child refugees.

**2.UN Agencies:** UN agencies, such as UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), are specialized organizations within the UN system. They have specific mandates related to child refugees:

* Protection: UNHCR is responsible for ensuring the protection of refugees, including children. They work to prevent refoulement and provide legal and physical protection to child refugees.
* Education and Healthcare: UNICEF focuses on providing education, healthcare, and nutrition to child refugees. They also address issues related to child labor, child soldiers, and child trafficking.
* Policy and Advocacy: UN agencies work to develop and promote international policies and standards related to child refugee protection. They also advocate for increased funding and resources to support child refugees.

**3.Governments:** Host and donor governments have significant responsibilities in ensuring child refugee protection:

* Legal Framework: Governments must adhere to international refugee and human rights law.
* Asylum and Resettlement: Host countries must provide a safe haven for child refugees and consider their asylum claims fairly. Governments can also participate in resettlement programs to offer durable solutions for child refugees.
* Preventing Family Separation: Governments should take measures to prevent family separation during displacement and, when separation occurs, work to reunify families.
* Community Integration: Governments should support the integration of child refugees into their host communities, including access to education and healthcare.

*Policy recommendations for protecting the rights of refugee children:*

* Access to Asylum and Protection: Ensure that refugee children have timely and fair access to asylum procedures and are not subject to deportation or pushback.
* Non-Discrimination: Implement policies and practices that prevent discrimination based on race, religion, nationality, or other factors.
* Family Reunification: Prioritize family reunification, ensuring that refugee children can be with their parents or legal guardians whenever possible.
* Legal Representation: Provide refugee children with legal representation in immigration and asylum proceedings.
* Monitoring and Reporting: Establish mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on the situation of refugee children, both in refugee camps and host communities, and ensure accountability for those who violate the rights of refugee children.
* Access to Education, healthcare and safe housing and adequate living conditions.