

# SPCCMUN

## SOCHUM Chair Report 1

**Committee:** Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM)

**Topic 1:** Refugee Rights for Children

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### Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Definition of Key Terms</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Important Bodies Involved</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Issues to Consider</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Possible Solutions</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Questions for Debate</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Further Readings</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>6</b>

## **Introduction**

Among the current 43 million refugees worldwide, 41% are children. Ongoing struggles with regional conflicts, natural disasters, domestic abuse, poverty, or human trafficking displace them from their original homes; as a result, they may have to seek international protection.

Of the safety risks a refugee must face, refugee children are especially vulnerable to threats of personal security, physical health, and psychological harm. Their dependence, vulnerability and developmental needs, as distinguished by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), requires immediate aid and assistance.

Despite the framework already established in these documents, in reality, refugees, especially children, are not met with the treatment guaranteed to them. Many are deported without ever having spoken to an attorney. Many, although successful in entering another country, end up being detained for years. Countries use detention as a deterrent, despite the lack of evidence that detention deters people from migrating or seeking asylum. This shows a direct contradiction of International and European human rights standards, which state that detention should be used only as a last resort.

Refugee children have constantly suffered from unfair treatment. It is thus of paramount importance to safeguard their rights and well-being in order to ensure a healthy and favourable living environment for these children, as promised in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

## **Definition of Key Terms**

A refugee is a person who has fled from their own country due to human rights abuses they have suffered there because of who they are or what they believe in, and whose own government cannot or will not protect them. As declared by the Refugee Convention, refugee rights include and are not limited to:

- protection from being forcibly returned to a country where they would be at risk of persecution;
- protection from discrimination;
- protection from penalties for illegal entry;
- the right to work, housing and education;
- the right to freedom of movement; and
- the right to identity and travel documents.

Moreover, Article 22 of the CRC states that whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, a child (refugee) should receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights. It also stipulates that countries should cooperate with the UN, as well as relevant IGOs and NGOs, in any efforts in protecting and assisting a child, and in tracing his/her family members.

## **Important Bodies Involved**

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

Also known as United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR is the main UN body working to protect and support refugees. They are mandated as the international coordinating body to target and resolve refugee problems.

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

UNICEF is a UN programme designated to provide humanitarian and developmental aid to children and mothers. Hence refugee children also fall under their scope of work, and they may provide assistance to refugees.

### *United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)*

UNRWA was established after the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict to provide assistance and protection to around 5 million registered Palestine refugees.

## Issues to Consider

Little action has been taken worldwide to protect the rights of refugee children. Although violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) shall be deplored, it should not be the main focus of the debate. This conference should instead strive to achieve a consensus on the solutions to the improper treatment of refugee children. Aspects such as the type of services provided, the quality of assistance offered, and the prosecution of human rights violations must be investigated and evaluated.

Delegates are advised to consider the following areas in the discussion:

- The needs of children seeking refugee status
- The rights of children and their family members
- How to ensure the well-being and safety of children
- Level of responsibility of a state in refugee work

### *Some Regions of Concern*

#### Source of refugees

**Afghanistan:** Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and from the subsequent years of turmoil in civil war, the Taliban era and Western invasions, Afghanistan has remained the largest source of refugees in the world for the last 32 years.

**Syria:** An estimate of 11 million Syrians have been displaced from their homes since the outbreak of the ongoing Syrian Civil War in 2011, of which at least 7.6 are internally displaced and 3.8 outside the country.

**Somalia:** Somalia has suffered from regional conflicts since the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, and is ineffectively administered by the new government since 2012, which only controls a fraction of the country. Ridden with famine and other severe humanitarian crises, over 1 million Somalis are internally displaced and another 1 million are refugees in neighboring countries.

#### Hosts of refugees

**Pakistan:** Pakistan is home to over 1.6 million refugees, making it the largest host to refugees in the world; as a result, it is economically burdened by the refugee population.

**Lebanon:** In terms of the ratio of refugees to population, Lebanon surpasses Pakistan in being the host to the most refugees: one person in every four is a refugee, the majority of which are Palestinians as well as Syrians.

**Iran:** Iran is host to more than 800 thousand refugees, mostly Afghans, many of whom have been staying in Iran for a prolonged period, having arrived before 2001.

## **Possible Solutions**

- Empower certain organizations/bodies to rightly intervene in the reception of refugee children
- Reach a consensus and agreement on the treatment and support provided to refugee children
- Establish a uniform action plan among member states upon the reception of refugee children

## **Questions for Debate**

- What are/should be the exact rights of children who are seeking refugee status?
- What is the most appropriate procedure for dealing with child refugees, considering their psychological needs, physical protection and application for refugee status? How should the rights of the child be prioritized respectively?
- To what extent do member states have the obligation to fulfill their responsibility in ensuring refugee rights? How should it relate to the state's ability and their own national situation?
- What role should NGOs (i.e. Refugees International) play in safeguarding the rights of refugee children?

## **Further Readings**

Study Guide: The Right of Refugees:

<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/studyguides/refugees.htm>

UNHCR Policy on Refugee Children:

<http://www.unhcr.org/3ae68ccc4.html>

A Framework for the Protection of Children:

<http://www.unhcr.org/50f6cf0b9.html>

## **References**

<http://info.arte.tv/en/where-do-refugees-come-where-are-they-going>

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet20en.pdf>

<http://refugeesinternational.org/where-we-work/africa/somalia>