

**ISRMUN** 2021

**UNICEF**

United Nations  
Children's Fund

**Committee:** United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

**Topic:** Improving access to education for refugee children with disabilities

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## I. Committee Background

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) was established on December 11th, 1946 by the United Nations General Assembly (History, 2010). UNICEF’s goal is to support the protection of children’s rights, help meet their basic needs, and expand their opportunities to reach their full potential from early childhood through adolescence. Its headquarters are located in New York City, New York, United States. UNICEF’s work takes place in more than 190 countries and territories (About, UNICEF, 2021). The committee has an Executive Board made up of 36 Member States elected to three-year terms by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), with the following regional assignments: Africa (8 seats), Asia (7), Latin America and Caribbean (5), and Western Europe and others (12) (Membership, UNICEF, 2021). Since its founding in 1946, UNICEF has been given recognitions such as the 1965 Nobel Peace Prize for “fulfilling the condition of Nobel’s will, the promotion of brotherhood among the nations” and emerging on the world stage as a “peace-factor of great importance” (Archives, UNICEF, 2021). Today, one of UNICEF’s main focuses is the current COVID-19 pandemic. Since the pandemic was announced in 2020, the committee has assisted 153 countries and territories with critical supplies and financial support. As a result, they have reached 261 million children with critical health, nutrition, education, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene, gender-based violence, and social protection services (Global COVID-19 Response, UNICEF, 2021).

## II. Topic Information

### A. History of the Topic

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a “quality education is the anchor that will keep children in the classroom, encouraging them to continue to the end of primary school and transition to secondary and beyond. For that reason, education has a protective effect only if it is of good quality.” The organization further states that “despite great progress in enrolling more refugee children in primary education, refugees are still lagging behind their peers in their host countries.” At a global level, it has been estimated by the UN that about 50% of the 3.5 million refugee children of primary school age do not go to school. Reasons for the low enrollment rates include low absorption capacity in local schools and the distance a child has to travel to get to the classroom (Starting Out, UNHCR, 2016).

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes the word “disability” as “part of being human.” It is estimated that about 15% of the global population lives with some form of disability. This percentage is equivalent to about 1 billion people and the number is increasing. Disabilities result in health conditions such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and depression, as well as personal and environmental factors including negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation, and public buildings, and limited social support. According to the WHO, “people with a disability experience poorer health outcomes, have less access to education and work opportunities and are more likely to live in poverty than those without a disability.” Evidence has shown that 50% of people with disabilities cannot afford healthcare. Progress has been made, but it is still not enough to meet their needs (Disability, WHO, 2021).

According to a study conducted by Handicap International and HelpAge, about 30% of refugees are challenged by a disability. Those who have a disability are affected tremendously when it comes to accessing humanitarian assistance in crisis, conflict, and war. In addition, they are at higher risk of violence, exploitation, and exclusion from available services. Not to forget that some conditions put other people in refugee camps at risk of harm due to poor nutrition and illnesses (Light for the world, 2016). Like any person with any condition, refugee children with disabilities have different capacities and needs and contribute differently to their communities (Persons with Disabilities, UNHCR, 2021). Therefore, because of their refugee status, these children are faced with many additional barriers to receiving a quality education. Other obstacles refugees are faced with include learning skills such as reading, writing, learning a language, and more. At times, they are often discriminated against due to their status, gender, and others (Bešić, et al., International Journal of Inclusive Education, 2020). The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, “too often invisible, too often forgotten, and too often overlooked, refugees with disabilities are among the most isolated, socially excluded and marginalized of all displaced populations” (Light for the World, 2016).

## B. Current Issues

**Austria:** In 2014, about 28,064 people applied for asylum in Austria. The number kept increasing and by 2015 it had reached 88,340. Most applicants came from Syria and Afghanistan. By December 2019, the number decreased to 12,886 asylum applications (Frontiers, 2020). Since the 1960s, Austria has experienced the challenge of giving good quality education to migrant children who did not speak German. Austria funded

about €143 million for the integration of migrants into the educational system (OHCHR, 2020). The country has had to deal with discrimination towards refugees with disabilities, especially children. Women with disabilities are the most in jeopardy and face higher risks of poverty, unemployment, and leaving school. Although schools in Austria have made it clear that refugees with a disability will not be left behind, there are still children who do not have the scholarly experience that every child deserves. The government has taken action and has addressed the public attitude to promote inclusive efforts by the community (Bešić, et al., International Journal of Inclusive Education, 2020).

**Chad:** About 300,000 people in Chad are constantly living under the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war. The country also hosts about 500,000 refugees from neighbouring countries (Human & Inclusion, 2019). Children in Chad, including refugees and those with disabilities, face a lack of education, lack of access to healthcare, poverty, child labour, etc. The lack of education is due to many difficulties the country is facing such as lack of funding and access to academic data and information. Part of the government's policies includes the integration of refugee camp schools into the national education system (Humanium, 2020). Chad has worked with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to gain funds for children in Chad as well as refugee children with disabilities to offer them the quality education that they need (JRS, 2021).

**Vietnam:** Approximately 5.8% of Vietnam's population (about 5,203,180 people) live with a disability. Out of that number, 23.3% are children under the age of 19 (The Borgen Project, 2019). Vietnam is among the first countries to adopt the Child Functioning Module developed by the Washington Group and UNICEF in 2016 to

identify children with disabilities (Children with Disabilities, UNICEF, 2018). Although Vietnam is becoming one of Asia's fastest-growing economies, there are still many Vietnamese refugees out of the country seeking a better life. Most of these refugees travel to the United States, where at school learning the Host country's language, English, has been hard for some Vietnamese children. The reason why some travelled to America was because of the aftermath of the Vietnamese war which caused serious harm to the country in general (Humanity & Inclusion, 2019).

### C. UN Action

The United Nations (UN) has taken a big part in solving this global issue that is affecting the lives of many refugee children. UNICEF has made efforts to increase the cooperation of governments, communities, and private sectors to provide education to these children as well as health services, shelter, nutrition, water, and sanitation. UNICEF has stated that "a child's migration status should never be a barrier to accessing basic services." Moreover, UNICEF has also worked to combat any sort of xenophobia or discrimination and suggests local leaders, religious groups, non-governmental organizations, the media, and private sectors to combat this unjust hate and raise a better understanding between refugee children including their families and their host country communities (Mission Statement, UNICEF, 2021).

### III. Essential Questions

1. What is a disability?
2. How many refugee children have a disability?

3. How are refugee children with a disability discriminated against?
4. What is the United Nations doing to address this issue?
5. Does your delegation host refugees? If so, how many are children?
6. Which organizations are working on addressing this issue? Does your delegation collaborate with any of them? If so, which ones?

#### IV. Resources

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