



United Nations High Commissioner
of Human Rights (UNHCHR)

HEIMUN 2019

TOPICS

1. Combating child labour/slavery in South-East Asia
2. Improving the situation of under-aged refugees in Western countries

CHAIRS

Valentin Wegener and Armin Bina

Table of contents:

Improving the situation of under-aged refugees in Western countries.....	3-7
Introduction.....	3
Background.....	3
Major Member States involved.....	4-5
Possible solutions.....	5-6
Bibliography and links for further reading.....	6-7

Introduction

According to the UNHCHR, we are witnessing a world, in which a person has to flee their home every two seconds . These are people, which are affected by violence originating from political, tribal and religious conflicts. Facing persecution due to racial, religious or political reasons, people flee their home. The people classified as refugees leave everything behind them in order to find a place of safety in another state enabling them to build up a new existence. To realize the perspective of a secured and new life, which is mainly linked with the western world, refugees embark on a difficult journey. Over the half of these 25.4 Million displaced persons risking their lives to reach Europe or North America are under the age of 18. These are children and adolescents, who have their lives ahead but as their future is not secured and guaranteed due to the on-going global conflicts, they are forced to flee their home country. This can not only tear families apart but also puts the numerous children and adolescents on the move at a great risk of harm and abuse. Although several western countries have accommodated numerous refugees, amongst them children, who are in great need of aid and resources, they face disadvantages often lacking legal representation.

Background

Due to the physical and mental vulnerability of under-aged refugees on the move it is essential for the country of asylum to provide the best possible conditions for these children to process the dangers they faced regarding their safety and well being. This includes an access to health care and a restoration of the familiar daily life. Therefore a stable daily routine for them is necessary. In the case of unaccompanied children the restoration of the daily life primarily involves to create a means of communication between the parents or relatives of the affected children. However these guidelines provided by the UNHCR are not always realized in the countries of asylum. Refugees are often facing intolerance resulting in discrimination in a new environment, which especially makes the affected children suffer. Bonded to the environment of refugee camps persons under the age of 18 are limited in their normal life activities and linguistic abilities regarding the language of the asylum country. This is the case in Greece, Cyprus and the balkans, where 72.000 refugees, among them an estimated amount of 22.500 under-aged refugees, are stranded unable to move forward due to the closure of the Balkan route. They are bonded to provisional camps living there under questionable conditions. Lacking any local interaction child refugees are not able receive education for example. A situation like in Greece only contributes to the further damage of refugee childrens well being and their whole situation. Nevertheless it is not only the integration process, which has to be improved. Rather, it is the system for asylum seekers focused on adults¹, that has to be adjusted regarding the best possible outcome for refugee children. The protection and care of people under 18 years of age assured by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is not always obeyed by several refugee-hosting countries.

1 Hodal, Kate. "Nearly half of all refugees are children, says Unicef." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media limited, 7 September 2016. Web. 22 March 2019.

Major Member States Involved

United States of America

Witnessing violence, poverty and a lack of future perspectives in central America, many people, mainly from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, fled their home country in the hope of finding a better life in the USA. Amongst these people are numerous children. Facing a wave of asylum seekers the refugee policy of the Trump administration is characterized by tight restrictions. The focus lies on limiting refugee numbers². Furthermore this course is linked with the plan of a wall along the Mexican-American border, one of president Trumps campaign promises. This indicates, that the refugee policy of the Trump administration may not be directed towards an improvement of the situation of especially displaced persons under the age of 18, who are held in overcrowded camps along the Mexican-American border.

2 Holpuch, Amanda. "Obama official's warning as Trump slashes refugee numbers." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media Limited, 19 September 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.

Greece

According to the UNHCR Greece approximately hosts 60.000 refugees. Due to EU border restrictions many of these people, having fled war and violence in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, are stuck on Greek islands like Lesbos, Chios, Kos and Samos but also in the mainland. Many displaced people, amongst them numerous children, have to live under questionable conditions in overcrowded camps³. Especially children suffer from these conditions. This refugee crisis coexists with an economic struggle of Greece. The country, the entry point to Europe, shoulders a large responsibility regarding the lives of the arrived people, especially when it comes to children.

3 Leape, Sebastian. "Greece has the means to help refugees on Lesbos-but does it have the will ?." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media Limited, 13 September 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.

Italy

Similar to Greece, Italy shoulders a responsibility for many lives of refugees. In contrast to Greece, Italy is not aiming to reach an effort in improving the overall situation. The refugee policy of the Italian far-right government is based on restriction, which for example led to the closing of Italian ports making them unaccessible to rescue vessels. Furthermore Italy strives for a relocation of asylum seekers EU-wide. Seeing itself as a rather temporary stay facility for numerous refugees, an improvement of the situation of them, under-aged or not, is rather not considered as a priority by the government.⁴

4 Tondo, Lorenzo. "Italy rejects record number of asylum applications." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media Limited, 14 February 2019. Web. 22 March 2019.

Spain

Spain continues to leave the ports open for rescue vessels accommodating a growing amount of refugees. Camps in southern Spain, where refugee arrivals take place, are becoming more and more overcrowded, which more and more burdens the capacity of these camps. The country shoulders an increasing responsibility for the lives of many displaced people amongst them numerous children. Nevertheless Spain is becoming a role model when it comes to the welcoming attitude towards refugees.⁵

5 Sánchez, Alvaro. "Spain is the most welcoming EU country for refugees, survey finds." Elpais.com. EDICIONES EL PAÍS S.L, 24 September 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.

Germany

In 2017 Germany was the top destination for under-aged refugees. According to UNICEF Germany registered 89.205 child asylum applications. Germany has promoted the improvement regarding the Situation of people, who fled their home countries. For example the parliament provided the Right for Family reunion, a right from which especially affected children benefit. Due to the high number of displaced people, that Germany accommodated, the government shoulders huge responsibility regarding their well-being and safety, especially when it comes to people under the age of 18⁶

6 Connolly, Kate. "Angela Merkel stands firm as Germany's refugee row intensifies." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media Limited, 15 June 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.

France

France has also accommodated many displaced persons, amongst them numerous children. However, many refugees found themselves isolated from society in the country. Because of that the administration of the French president Emmanuel Macron set up the Volont' r programm, which was lauched in january 2019. The community service, which also addresses under-aged persons, is supposed to speed up the integration process of refugees.⁷

7 Timsit, Annabelle. "France has a compassionate plan to help young refugees make friends and get jobs." Quartz.com. Uzabase Inc, 26 October 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.

Sweden

Sweden took up a large number of escapees in the past years. Due to the rise of the right wing party in the last elections, the situation for refugees, (especially for refugee children), is rather a difficult one⁸.

This political shift towards the right results in an intensification of the Swedish refugee policy concentrated on limiting the accommodation rate.

8 Henley, Jon. "Anti-migrant feeling fuels Swedish far right as election looms." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media Limited, 2 September 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.

Possible Solutions

To succeed in improving the situation for under-aged refugees in western countries, optimal housing and living conditions must be ensured in the country of asylum. Optimal conditions will offer an atmosphere of safety and peace, which is essential for children traumatized by events like war. Furthermore displaced people under the age of 18 should have a direct access to the education system of a country. Consequently the profession of teaching needs to be prioritized by investing more money in educational facilities in order to offer a higher amount of teachers in the future. More teachers allow extra language classes next to normal school subjects. Not only teachers but also refugees would have to put in a lot of effort to learn a new language and at the same time attend school. But especially the children amongst them, who fled their home country due to a lack of future perspectives, are willing to build up a new life. Education is their key to a secured future in a new country. As the children of today will be the Politicians of tomorrow, certain ideas and impulses transmitted to these children, can help them to rebuild their home countries, influenced by the knowledge they acquired in another state. However, a successful improvement of the situation of under-aged escapees is not only based on optimal living conditions and education but also requires an atmosphere of tolerance. In a time of growing intolerance linked with the rise of populist parties in more and more western countries, enlightenment between refugees and the local people is crucial. This can happen in form of public campaigns and conversations for example. Under-aged refugees must not forget their origin and culture. It must be respected by the hosting country, and at the same time they need to get to know the culture of their new home. An improvement of the situation of displaced people in the asylum country can only happen by the presence of mutual respect in all areas of life and the awareness of a special treatment and care for under-aged refugees.

Bibliography

Background

- 1 Hodal, Kate. "Nearly half of all refugees are children, says Unicef." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media limited, 7 September 2016. Web. 22 March 2019.

Major Member States Involved

- Connolly, Kate. "Angela Merkel stands firm as Germany's refugee row intensifies." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media Limited, 15 June 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.
- Henley, Jon. "Anti-migrant feeling fuels Swedish far right as election looms." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media Limited, 2 September 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.
- Holpuch, Amanda. "Obama official's warning as Trump slashes refugee numbers." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media Limited, 19 September 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.
- Leape, Sebastian. "Greece has the means to help refugees on Lesbos-but does it have the will?." Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media Limited, 13 September 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.
- Sánchez, Alvaro. "Spain is the most welcoming EU country for refugees, survey finds." Elpais.com. EDICIONES EL PAÍS S.L, 24 September 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.

- Timsit, Annabelle. “France has a compassionate plan to help young refugees make friends and get jobs.” Quartz.com. Uzabase Inc, 26 October 2018. Web. 22 March 2019.
- Tondo, Lorenzo. “Italy rejects record number of asylum applications.” Guardian.com. Guardian News and Media Limited, 14 February 2019. Web. 22 March 2019.

General Information

- <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html>
- <https://www.amnesty.org.au/refugee-and-an-asylum-seeker-difference/>
- <https://www.unhcr.org/excom/scip/3ae68ccc18/note-refugee-children.html>
- <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>
- <https://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b84c6c67.pdf>
- <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>
- <https://www.unicef.org/eca/emergencies/latest-statistics-and-graphics-refugee-and-migrant-children>
- <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2018/8/5b86342b4/four-million-refugee-children-schooling-unhcr-report.html>
- <https://www.unicef.org/eca/emergencies/refugee-and-migrant-children-europe>
- <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/which-countries-treat-children-like-children/>
- <https://www.unhcr.org/desperatejourneys/>