



**WAR**  
child

PHOTO: JAMES MARCUS HANEY

# 'I'VE MOVED, MY RIGHTS HAVEN'T'

WAR CHILD BRIEFING  
SEPTEMBER 2016

TOWARDS A GLOBAL ACTION  
PLAN FOR CHILDREN FORCED  
TO FLEE



PHOTO: JAMES MARGUS HANEY

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PHOTO: JAMES MARCUS HANEY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in a world in which 28 million children have been driven from their homes as a result of conflict, persecution and insecurity<sup>1</sup>. If current trends continue, more than 63 million children could be forced to flee by 2025<sup>2</sup>, of which over 25 million will cross borders and become refugees. At least 300,000 of these child refugees will end up alone, separated from their families<sup>3</sup>. Without a step-change in the provision of education for refugee children, at least 12 million of them will be out of school by 2025<sup>4</sup>.

A crisis of unprecedented proportions is unfolding for children forced to flee conflict and insecurity. The international community is failing to provide the support they need. Despite the fact that children make up half the world's refugees, it is estimated that less than 5% of humanitarian funding is dedicated to child protection and education. There is a chronic underfunding of UN appeals for humanitarian response in countries where the largest numbers of children are fleeing conflict – including Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia, where appeals are under-funded by an average of 60%<sup>5</sup>. In the countries where since 2015 the largest numbers of children have been newly displaced such as Yemen, Iraq and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the figures tell the same story of consistent underfunding and deprioritisation<sup>6</sup>. More shocking still is the fact that across countries where the largest numbers of children are displaced by conflict it is education and protection that are among the most severely under-funded sectors. Education was the least-funded sector in almost a third of these countries in 2015, with 73% and 85% of funding needs unmet in Iraq and DRC respectively in 2015. Protection (including child protection), was funded at less than 20% of requests and was among the most severely underfunded in half of all cases in 2015. The results are catastrophic, if not deadly, for children.

As a result, children caught up in conflict, and their families, face an impossible choice. To risk their lives if they stay, or to risk their futures if they leave. As civilian populations are increasingly targeted in conflicts around the world, children face a myriad of threats and dangers – from death and injury, through to abuse, exploitation, torture and recruitment into armed groups. Yet even when children and their families take the perilous, often life endangering decision to leave behind everything they know and, often, everyone they love, they are not met with the protection, refuge and safety that our international laws and conventions promise. On the contrary, they often face similar threats to those they did at home.





PHOTO: RICHARD POHLE

The sheer scale of child displacement, combined with a humanitarian system that is failing to meet their needs, means that the basic rights of millions of children are being denied. This is despite the fact that these rights are innate, and should stay with them even when they flee. They may have moved, their rights haven't. It is a scandal that any child, let alone many millions, should be forced into this position, especially when international laws and conventions (such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Refugee Convention) were created to prevent the denial of their rights and secure the protection of every child, no matter where the lottery of life meant they were born. There is a core set of rights that no child fleeing conflict should be denied, including as a priority:

- The right to be protected from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect
- The right to live free from fear and discrimination
- The right to access a quality education
- The right to have one's family life upheld
- The right to be able to participate and be heard.

It is incumbent upon world leaders and the international community to do everything possible to ensure that the rights of children are upheld, wherever they are. This means developing a Global Action Plan for children forced to flee, that would redouble political and financial commitment to tackle the growing crisis head-on, and ensure that:

- No child forced to flee is out of school for more than one month - by mobilising \$4bn for education in emergencies by 2020
- Child Protection funding requests in UN appeals are fully funded - with no child protection efforts failing for lack of finance.
- No child forced to flee is criminalised - by committing to eliminate child detention of displaced minors.
- There are guaranteed safe and legal routes for children forced to flee, with countries resettling a fair share of displaced children – particularly unaccompanied minors.

For the thousands of children who flee conflict every day, they have already lost so much. It is unacceptable that they should also lose their rights. The unfolding crisis for children forced to flee demands an urgent, coordinated and global response.



## **PART 1: THE UNFOLDING CRISIS**



PHOTO: JAMES MARCUS HANEY

Nearly one in every 200 children in the world is a refugee<sup>7</sup>. And 28 million children have been driven from their homes as a result of conflict and insecurity<sup>8</sup>. The number of children that are currently forcibly displaced by conflict is far greater than the entire population of Australia and is almost three times the child population of England<sup>9</sup>. Children comprised over half of the global total of the refugee population in 2015<sup>10</sup> and between 2010 and 2015, the number of child refugees under UNHCR's mandate rocketed by 77 per cent<sup>11</sup>. If current trends continue, more than 63 million children could be forced to flee by 2025, of whom more than 25 million will end up as refugees – with more than 300,000 separated from their families. Without a step-change in the provision of education for child refugees, over 12 million of them will be out of school by 2025. It is clear that a crisis of unprecedented proportions is unfolding for displaced children.

Yet despite the fact that children make up half the world's refugees, it is estimated that less than 5% of humanitarian funding is dedicated to child protection and education. There is a chronic under-funding of UN appeals for humanitarian response in countries of origin of the largest numbers of refugees globally - including Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia<sup>12</sup>, as well as countries where the largest number of people are newly displaced - such as Yemen, Iraq and DRC<sup>13</sup>. Appeals are underfunded on average by 60%, and these countries all share in common that their populations are overwhelmingly young, with children and young people making up two-thirds of the entire demographic, and those under 14 comprising one third. Children are in fact overrepresented as over half of the refugees fleeing from Sudan and Syria (50% of refugees from Sudan are children<sup>14</sup> and 51% of Syria's refugees are children - 2.5 million in total)<sup>15</sup>. The protracted conflict in Afghanistan is not only the second largest origin of the world's refugees, it was also in the sixth largest source of newly displaced people in 2015, and inside Afghanistan the displaced population is made up of more children than adults<sup>16</sup>.

A more alarming picture emerges when the specific areas of underfunding are analysed. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate that efforts to feed, shelter and support the recovery, return and integration of IDPs are among the most underfunded areas of UN humanitarian response appeals for all the highest refugee-producing nations of 2015. Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) was 91% underfunded in the Syria response for 2015, on a par with shelter and non-food items. Together this shows a near abandonment of support for the very sectors that are crucial for supporting internally displaced children.





PHOTO: RICHARD POHLE

The overall role of CCCM Cluster is to *“improve living conditions of internally displaced persons by facilitating the effective provision of protection and services in camps and camp-like settings, advocate for durable solutions and ensure organized closure and phase-out of camps upon the IDPs’ relocation, return, resettlement or local integration”*.

Consistent global underfunding to provide conflict-affected families with shelter and safe and habitable camps indicates there could be a strong direct link between a lack of assistance for internally displaced people and the decision to flee across borders.

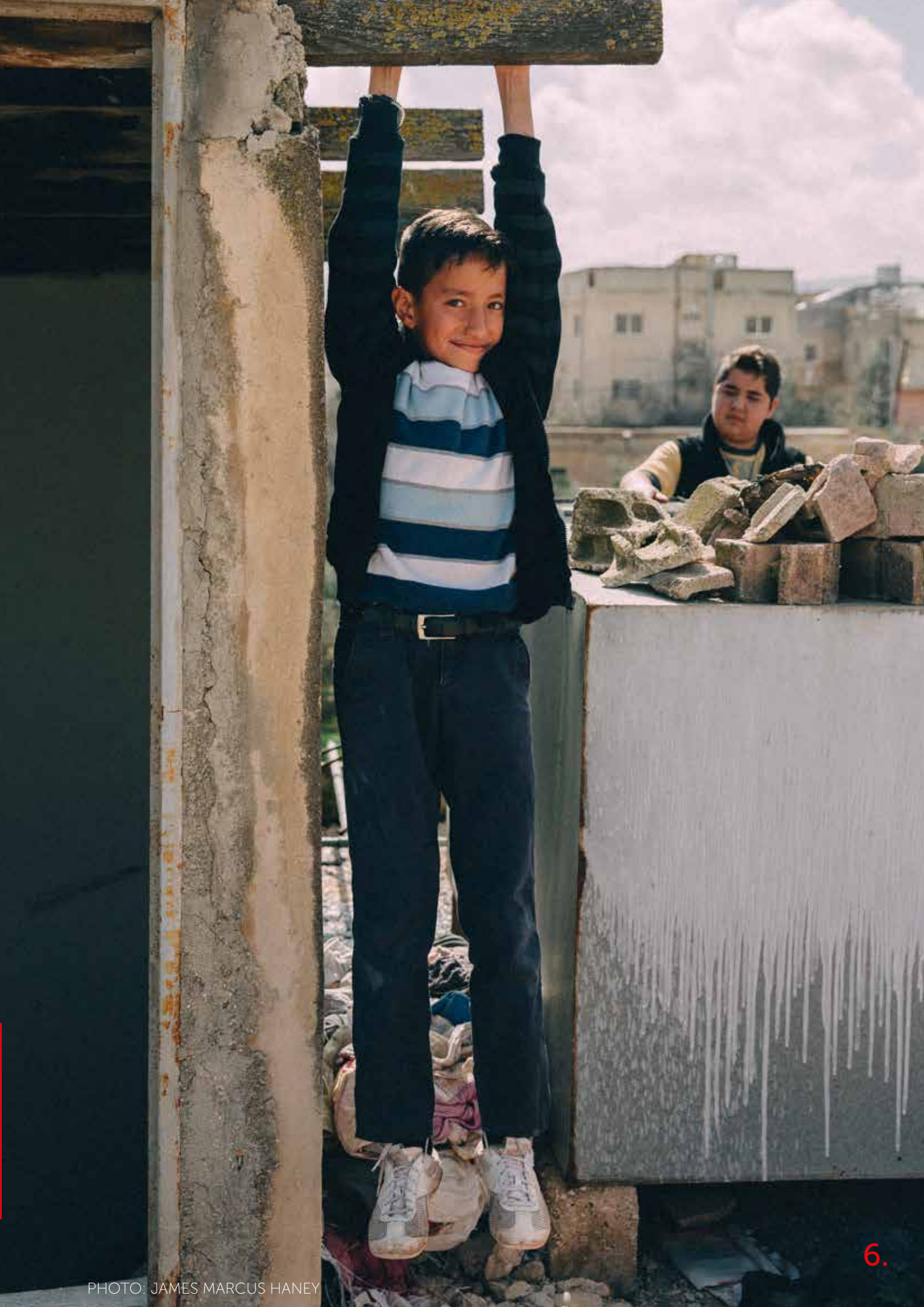
Most alarmingly for children’s safety, wellbeing, future prospects and basic human rights – education and protection (which includes child protection) were also among the most commonly underfunded humanitarian response sectors for nations producing the greatest numbers of refugees and newly displaced people, it ranked in the bottom three for appeal funding in nine cases. **Education was the least funded sector of all in almost a third of all cases** (3/10). Funding to Iraq, for example, shows a severe lack of donor focus and coordination on children’s acute needs. Education in the Iraq response was only funded at 27% of the requested amounts for 2015, and yet this was not owing to a lack of funds overall: ‘Emergency Telecommunications’ was funded at over four times the amount requested by the UN appeal, for instance<sup>17</sup>.

**Protection (which includes child protection as a sub-sector) was among the top underfunded response areas in 50% of all cases – and was always funded at less than 20% against requests.** In Yemen, where children are experiencing the gravest violations to their rights, including sexual violence, Gender Based Violence and education received no funding at all and protection received a meagre 17% of the requested funds. **The results are catastrophic, if not deadly, for children.**



**“Children are exposed to a lot of things. They might suffer psychologically, they might be unable to continue studying at school, they might not be able to take study sessions, and that could have an impact on all kids”.**

**RIMA, SYRIAN GIRL IN JORDAN, CONSULTED THROUGH WAR CHILD’S VOICEMORE PROGRAMME**





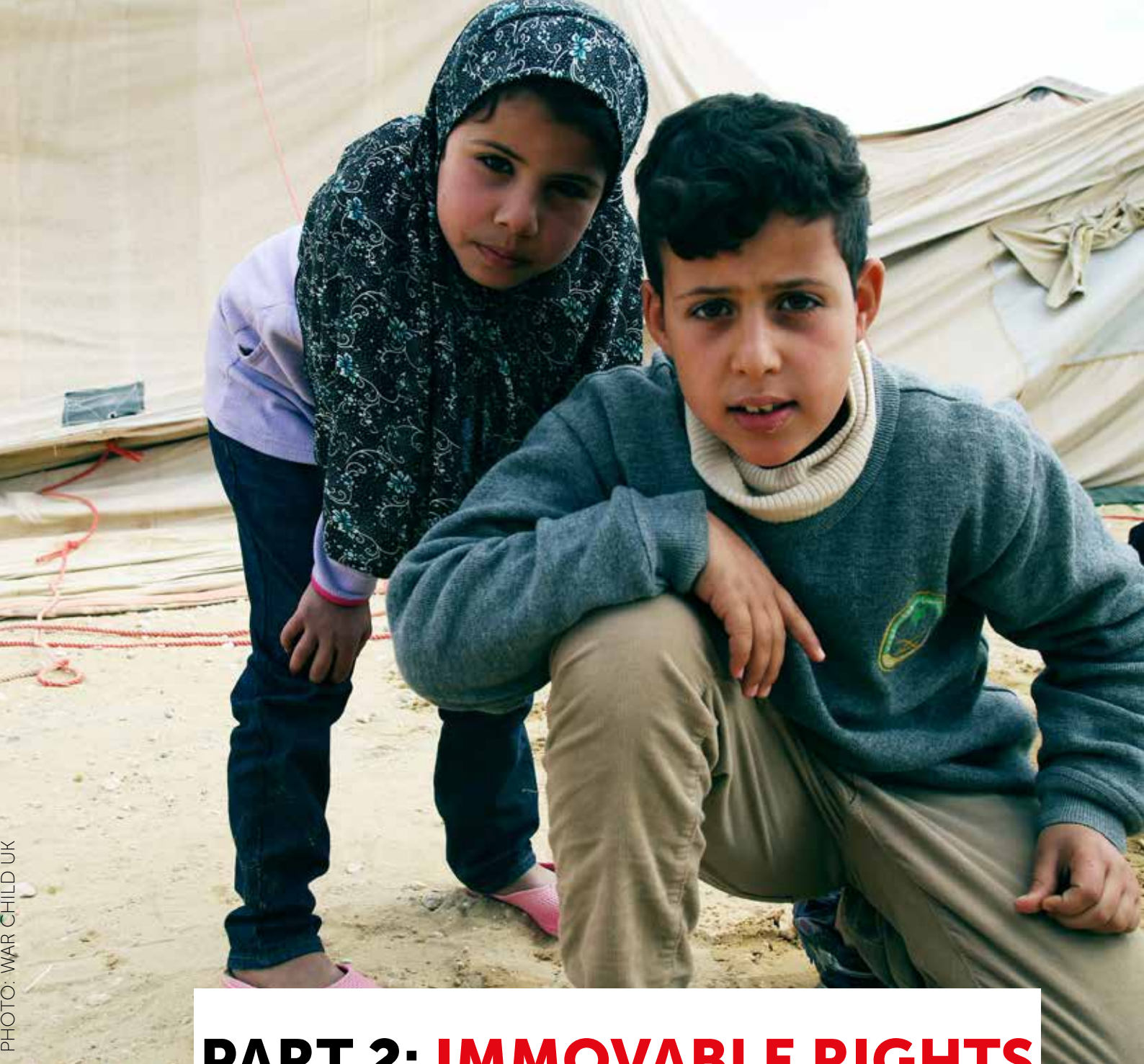
Origin of largest refugee nationals globally <sup>18</sup>	National child and youth population % <sup>19</sup>	Level of underfunding to 2015 response plans <sup>20</sup>	Level of underfunding to 2016 response plans <sup>21</sup>	Lowest funded sectors to support humanitarian needs in 2015 <sup>22</sup>
<b>Syria (4.9m)</b>	<b>52%</b> (32% of which are under 14 years old)	<b>Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (inside Syria) = 57%</b>	<b>Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (inside Syria) = 66%</b>	<b>Shelter and non-food items = 91% of funding requests unmet<sup>23</sup></b> <b>Camp coordination and camp management = 91% of funding requests unmet<sup>24</sup></b>
<b>Afghanistan (2.7m)</b>	<b>64%</b> (41.5% of which are under 14 years old)	<b>Humanitarian Response Plan 2015 = 29%</b>	<b>Afghanistan 2016 Plan = 56%</b>	<b>Emergency shelter and non-food items = 86% funding requests unmet</b> <b>Multi-sector support = 79% funding requests unmet</b> <b>Protection = 76% funding requests unmet</b>
<b>Somalia (1.1m)</b>	<b>62.5%</b> (43.7% of which are under 14 years old)	<b>Humanitarian Response Plan 2015 = 56%</b>	<b>Somalia 2016 Plan = 68%</b>	<b>Education = 73% of funding requests unmet</b> <b>Multi-Sector for Refugees and Returnees = 73% of funding unmet<sup>25</sup></b>
<b>South Sudan (800,000)</b>	<b>65%</b> (45% of which are under 14 years old)	<b>Humanitarian Response Plan 2015 = 44%</b>	<b>South Sudan 2016 Plan = 59%</b>	<b>Recovery, returns and reintegration = 90% of funding unmet</b> <b>Protection = 83% funding requests unmet<sup>26</sup></b>

**FIGURE 1: ORIGIN OF LARGEST REFUGEE NATIONALS, ASSOCIATED POPULATIONS AND UNDERFUNDING**

Largest number of newly displaced in 2015 <sup>27</sup>	National child and youth population % <sup>28</sup>	Level of underfunding to 2015 response plans	Level of underfunding to 2016 response plans <sup>29</sup>	Lowest funded sectors to support humanitarian needs in 2015 <sup>30</sup>
Yemen (over 2.5m)	62% (41% of which are under 14 years old)	Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan = 44%	Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan = 69%	Gender Based Violence Sub-cluster = 0% funded Protection = 83% of funding requests unmet <sup>31</sup>
Iraq (808,700)	59% (40% of which are under 14 years old)	Iraq 2015 Humanitarian Response Plan = 23%	Iraq 2016 Plan = 47%	Education = 73% of funding requests unmet Camp coordination and camp management = 78% of funding requests unmet <sup>32</sup>
Ukraine (800,000)	26% (15% of which are under 14 years old)	Ukraine Humanitarian Response 2016 Plan = 39%	Ukraine Humanitarian Response 2016 Plan = 76%	Water and Sanitation = 91% funding requests unmet Emergency shelter and non-food items = 80% funding requests unmet <sup>33</sup>
Sudan (639,500)	61% (40% of which are under 14 years old)	Sudan 2015 Humanitarian Response Plan = 44%	Sudan 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan = 59%	Recovery, returns and reintegration = 90% funding requests unmet Protection = 83% of funding requests unmet <sup>34</sup>
DRC (637,900)	64% (42.6% of which are under 14 years old)	DRC 2015 Humanitarian Response Plan = 46%	DRC 2015 Humanitarian Response Plan = 57%	Education = 85% funding requests unmet Emergency shelter and non-food items = 85% funding requests unmet <sup>35</sup>
Afghanistan (492,600)	64% (41.5% of which are under 14 years old)	Humanitarian Response Plan 2015 = 29%	Afghanistan 2016 Plan = 56%	Emergency shelter and non-food items = 86% funding requests unmet Multi-sector support = 79% funding requests unmet Protection = 76% funding requests unmet

**FIGURE 2: ORIGIN OF LARGEST NEWLY DISPLACED NATIONALS, ASSOCIATED POPULATIONS AND UNDERFUNDING**





## **PART 2: IMMOVABLE RIGHTS**

**UPHOLDING THE 'IMMOVABLE RIGHTS' FOR CHILDREN FORCED TO FLEE**



Children are under the threat of violence at an unprecedented scale. The basic rules of war are increasingly being violated through indiscriminate bombings of civilian areas, and the purposeful targeting of schools and hospitals. If they escape alive or without injury, they are still not safe, as in conflict-ravaged countries they contend with the multiple threats of rape, sexual violence, torture, kidnapping, forced recruitment into armed groups and early marriages, to name a few. These grave violations of children's rights, combined with staggeringly insufficient protection offered by the international community in their national contexts, are leading to a level of mass displacement that has reached historic proportions.

As a result, children caught up in conflict, and their families, face an impossible choice: to risk their lives if they stay, or to risk their futures and leave. When children and their families take the perilous, often life endangering decision to leave behind everything they know, they are all-too often not met with the protection, refuge and safety that they deserve. On the contrary, they often face similar threats to those they did at home, and bleak prospects for the future. Refugee camps often have high rates of sexual violence<sup>36</sup> – from Jordan to Calais there are testimonies of sexual assault on children in displacement camps<sup>37</sup>. Refugee children and adolescents are also five times more likely to be out of school than their non refugee peers<sup>38</sup>.

Young refugee girls are often forced into early marriages in a misplaced effort to bring them greater support and security - child marriage among Syrians in Jordan almost tripled from 2011-2014<sup>39</sup>.

*"I never felt like a normal child. My two brothers suffer from psychological trauma from the war, and need constant care and medication, while two of my younger sisters have physical disabilities, and I'm responsible for taking care of them. My dad died in Syria. During the siege on our town by the warring armies, he went out to get us some food because we were starving, but he never made it back alive. That's when my mother decided to take us to Jordan. We'd at least be safer there."*

**NAWJA, TEN YEAR-OLD SYRIAN GIRL IN WAR CHILD'S INFORMAL EDUCATION AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMME, FUNDED BY UNESCO AND THE EUROPEAN UNION IN ZA'ATARI REFUGEE CAMP, JORDAN.**



Displacement can endure for decades<sup>40</sup>, meaning many children spend their entire childhood dislocated and with no sense of stability. A further 70,000 children are born into displacement, ending up stateless, every single year<sup>41</sup>.

Children trying to save their lives and futures are not criminals, yet they are being locked up, beaten and abused by the authorities that should welcome and protect them across borders. Many are detained as part of their desperate search for safety. Little information is available on the numbers of children administratively detained for immigration reasons, but it is estimated that as many as one million children are affected by immigration detention polices worldwide<sup>42</sup>. In an International Detention Coalition (IDC) survey of 20 countries, 60 per cent of respondents reported that their State did not collect or publish official statistics on the numbers, or the demographic make-up, of people detained for immigration purposes<sup>43</sup>. This is despite the fact that international laws and conventions exist to prevent the denial of their children's rights and secure the protection of every child, no matter where the lottery of life meant they were born. By ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), every country in the world (except for the USA) has agreed to the provision of specific protection measures for all children.

EVERY MORNING

**1/200**

CHILDREN WAKES UP  
AS A REFUGEE

**63**

**MILLION CHILDREN  
WILL BE DISPLACED BY  
CONFLICT BY 2025**

IN THE  
NEXT 10  
YEARS

**300,000**

CHILD  
REFUGEES  
WILL END UP  
SEPARATED  
FROM THEIR  
FAMILIES

**THE GLOBAL IMPACT ON CHILDREN WITHIN THE NEXT  
DECADE (BY 2025) WOULD BE CATASTROPHIC, FOR EXAMPLE:**

**12.5 MILLION  
CHILD REFUGEES**

WILL BE DENIED AN EDUCATION.

**70,000  
CHILDREN**

ARE BORN INTO DISPLACEMENT EVERY  
YEAR

*"On our first night there she [my daughter] went to the toilet but came back screaming and very upset. She would not tell me what happened. We found out that she had been attacked by a man and raped near the toilets. I have three daughters. [The camp] is not a safe place. I had to take the family out the next day and we came to live here [in the village]."*

## TESTIMONY TO WAR CHILD UK OF A SYRIAN FATHER IN JORDAN

The UNCRC already makes provision for displaced children in Articles 2 and 3:

- A State must ensure the rights of each child within (its) jurisdiction "without discrimination of any kind" (Article 2)
- "In all actions concerning children . . . the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (Article 3)"
- The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol (Relating to the Status of Refugees) also set international legal standards for both children and adults:
- A child who has a "well-founded fear of being persecuted" is a "refugee";
- A child who holds refugee status cannot be forced to return to the country of origin (the principle of non-refoulement);
- No distinction is made between children and adults in social welfare and legal rights.<sup>44</sup>

Every child has the same rights. This should never change when a child is forced to flee their home. The thousands of children who are forced to flee conflict every day have already lost so much: it is unacceptable that they also lose their rights. They may have moved, their rights haven't.

Children must also be accorded special priority and attention reflective of the unique and acute vulnerabilities of boys and girls forced to flee. Every displaced child is entitled to all of the rights set out in the UN Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC), but there are some core rights that must be upheld as a priority for children forced to flee conflict.

These include the rights:

1. To be protected from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect.
2. To have access to a quality free education.
3. To retain their status as children and live free from fear and discrimination.
4. To have their right to family life upheld
5. To be able to exercise their rights to participate, be heard and be informed.







PHOTO: JAMES MARCUS HANEY

## **1. EVERY CHILD FORCED TO FLEE CONFLICT MUST BE PROTECTED FROM VIOLENCE, EXPLOITATION, ABUSE AND NEGLECT.**

Children forced to flee, especially those unaccompanied or separated from their families – are particularly vulnerable to abuse (including sexual abuse), exploitation and violence. In some conflict-affected states, over 80% of survivors of sexual violence are children<sup>45</sup> and the fear and prevalence of such widespread abuse is also a strong push factor in the decision for families to flee<sup>46</sup>.

Agencies on the ground in Syria and Iraq have also found evidence that child and forced marriages are increasingly being deployed as weapons of war<sup>47</sup>. But when girls escape their communities, they are not safe from the same fate. In Jordan, accounting only for the marriages which are officially registered (and therefore probably a gross underestimate) child marriage among Syrians saw an exponential increase from 2011-2014, almost tripling to 32% of the overall number of registered marriages<sup>48</sup>. Well over a quarter of girls involved (32%) are marrying men between 10-14 years older than them<sup>49</sup>. Similarly, in Turkey, the majority of marriages take place when girls are still children<sup>50</sup>.

Children are not only facing sexual exploitation but labour exploitation. For example the Syria crisis has dramatically reduced livelihood opportunities and impoverished millions in the region. Whether in Syria or neighbouring countries, children are often the main – or even the sole -- breadwinners. In Jordan, 47% of refugee households say they rely partly or entirely on income generated by a child<sup>51</sup>. In the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, heads of households reported that 13.3% of children aged between seven and 17 years old were working. However, when children themselves were asked whether they had worked during the preceding week, a much higher percentage (34.5%) said they had<sup>52</sup>. More and more younger children are being drawn into the workforce. In the Jordan Valley, for example, 17.9% of children from Syria working in agriculture are under the age of 12<sup>53</sup>, and In Iraq, nearly 77% of refugee children from Syria worked to support their families<sup>54</sup>.

**“My opinion about marriage at early ages is that it is wrong, very wrong. Unfortunately, it happens a lot here in the camp.”**

**NUHA, SYRIAN GIRL IN JORDAN, CONSULTED THROUGH WAR CHILD'S VOICEMORE PROGRAMME**



**13.**



PHOTO: LOUIS LEESON

increasing trend of Islamic State infiltrating IDP and refugee camps to target and recruit large groups of vulnerable children<sup>55</sup>. A trend corroborated by the observations of aid agencies working on the ground, including War Child in Iraq. Although international law theoretically demands that the civilian and humanitarian sanctuary of refugee camps is upheld (and prohibits refugee participation in military activity), international law is not applied to those in IDP camps who are assumed to be under the care and protection of their national government (even though abuses from said governments are often the driver of internal displacement in the first place). The result for children is that, ***“in many cases, IDP camps remain almost unprotected, thus turning into major recruitment grounds, infiltrated by fighting forces”***<sup>56</sup>.

International law decrees that children should be protected from the kind of exploitation, violence, abuse and neglect inherent in increasing trends of sexual violence, child marriage, child labour and coercion into armed groups. Yet in too many cases, even though children’s rights are clear, they are not being upheld.

### **WAR CHILD CASE STORY: GRACE FROM SOUTH SUDAN**

Grace is 15 years old. She travelled to Uganda to escape the ongoing conflict in South Sudan and to try and live a peaceful life. In the refugee settlement, Grace used to fetch water for her family from a nearby bore hole. There were always long queues and hours to wait. One evening, at around 8pm, Grace went to fetch water as normal and a man from the camp told her that he will provide the water if she comes with him to the nearby school. Grace had known him for a while, so went with him. The man raped Grace. She was so scared of the situation that she did not report it to anyone. After a couple of months her mother realised that she was not well and later found out that she was pregnant. Grace should never have faced this double trauma; she should have been protected as a refugee. With War Child’s support, social workers helped Grace to cope with her experience, to know that it was not her fault, and eventually to deliver a baby girl, Joan.



PHOTO: RICHARD POHLE

## **2. EVERY CHILD FORCED TO FLEE CONFLICT MUST HAVE THEIR RIGHT TO A QUALITY FREE EDUCATION SUSTAINED.**

At least 50% of refugee children are out of school<sup>57</sup> meaning 3.6 million of them are being denied an education<sup>58</sup>

Refugee children and adolescents are five times more likely to be out of school than their non-refugee peers<sup>59</sup>. 16 countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East collectively host 2.1 million refugee children of school-age (5-17 years), an estimated 57% of whom are not in school<sup>60</sup>.

In accordance with the Refugee Convention, child refugees must receive equal treatment as nationals in regards to primary education (Article 22). Children and young people should also be provided with secondary education and alternatives to the worst forms of child labour. However, the reality represents a starkly different picture: 50% of primary school-age refugee children are out of school, 75% of adolescent refugees at secondary education level are out of school, and only 1% have access to tertiary education<sup>61</sup>.



**“I hope that we will have more possibilities in the camp. The reason for this is that education is the most important thing in our lives in wartime”**

**AISHA, SYRIAN GIRL IN JORDAN, CONSULTED THROUGH WAR CHILD'S VOICEMORE PROGRAMME**

Education is consistently highlighted as top priority by children<sup>62</sup>. Multiple international commitments, including the Millennium Development Goals and now the Sustainable Development Goals, have promised to get every child on the planet into school and there is a commitment from world leaders to 'leave no one behind'. Still, day after day the neglect of education as a priority response to displacement risks a lost generation of children and young people. UNHCR consequently states that 'sustainable access to quality education is still a key concern for the children under its mandate'<sup>63</sup>.





PHOTO: WAR CHILD UK

### **3. EVERY CHILD FORCED TO FLEE CONFLICT HAS THE RIGHT TO RETAIN THEIR STATUS AS A CHILD, LIVE FREE FROM FEAR AND DISCRIMINATION, AND ACCESS APPROPRIATE PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT.**

Children (including adolescents) must be seen as children and human beings first, but too often they are faced with discrimination and maltreatment when forced to flee their homes and when they arrive in new areas or at foreign borders<sup>64</sup>. Such discrimination can have profound psychological and developmental impacts. For instance, in a Western context of child immigrants, it was found that, *“experiencing discrimination can provoke stress responses similar to post-traumatic stress disorder.”*<sup>65</sup>

War Child knows from its experience of working with children fleeing conflict that they have already been exposed to high levels of trauma, and that an absence of emotional support and unconditional care from adults can lead to long-term psychological damage. To mitigate against this it is crucial that every child must be able to play, have access to leisure activities and be given the necessary psychological support to help overcome the trauma inherited through witnessing and experiencing conflict and violence. To this end, Child Friendly Spaces should be provided in every IDP and refugee camp as standard and special provision should be made for child-headed family groups or ‘households’.

*“For the displaced and uprooted...providing adequate mental health support goes beyond being a secondary service or obligation. We would not be exaggerating if we say that, in fact, it is a life-saving obligation, because - of all situations that can cause irreversible damage, lack of access to mental health support is one of them”*

**SALIM SALAMAH, SYRIAN REFUGEE ACTIVIST AND UN SECRETARY GENERAL YOUTH ENVOY ON PEACE AND SECURITY**

Displaced children must also still be ‘engaged in community life for healthy development and recovery’<sup>66</sup>. Children should receive culturally specific support that welcomes the culture of displaced children. For example, War Child has cultural mediators to support South Sudanese child refugees in Uganda. Community recreational events, such as joint football matches, should also be offered as these not only help the children, but build community cohesion between the host culture and displaced children - an issue that is increasingly vital as the proportion of refugees to host nationals grows.



PHOTO: JAMES MARCUS HANEY

#### **4. EVERY CHILD FORCED TO FLEE CONFLICT MUST HAVE THEIR RIGHT TO FAMILY LIFE UPHELD.**

Family separation exacerbates risks dramatically for children. All displaced children, but especially those travelling alone or without their parents, (unaccompanied and separated minors) are at far greater risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. According to the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), unaccompanied children arriving into Europe are at particular risk of trafficking and sexual exploitation and, owing to a fear of being locked in 'child protection' facilities often do not want to disclose that they are children<sup>67</sup>.

ENOC states that: *"Many children, both unaccompanied children and children travelling with their families, are being extorted by smugglers, including threats against family members still in the country of origin or in refugee camps<sup>68</sup>"* Of the children that crossed into Italy illegally in 2015, 72% (out of 16,500) were unaccompanied<sup>69</sup>. ENOC raises the right to family life as a particular failure of Europe in response to the displacement crisis; *"...from a child rights perspective, the actions taken by individual states are worrying, in particular the restrictions possibilities for family reunification that many states have announced.<sup>70</sup>"*

War Child's own experience of working with child refugees in Jordan tells us that being reunified with families is a major priority for them. Children and young people often find that their family is scattered across countries and continents, and where one or more parent is absent this increases the pressure on girls and young women to marry below the legal age, as a way of guaranteeing some level of support through a husband<sup>71</sup>.

Family tracing and reunification need to be integrated into all emergency response and border control mechanisms, allowing children to be reunited with relatives (not only parents) who reside in different countries, giving refugee children the same rights to family reunion as adult refugees and allowing children to be reunited with parents who are overseas.



**"I came to the camp and each family member of mine is in a different place. Family reunification is rare here."**

**NABILA, SYRIAN GIRL IN JORDAN, CONSULTED THROUGH WAR CHILD'S VOICEMORE PROGRAMME**



PHOTO: RICHARD POHLE

## **5. TO HELP SECURE THE PROTECTION OF ALL THE ABOVE RIGHTS EVERY CHILD FORCED TO FLEE CONFLICT MUST BE ABLE TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, BE HEARD AND BE INFORMED.**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) - adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 – includes a provision that seeks to uphold the rights of children to express themselves and be heard, under Article 12:

**1. State's Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.**

**2. For this purpose the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.**

Children who have been forced to flee are at particular risk of this right being denied to them, as different jurisdictions and authorities attempt to deal with or 'process' their case without seeking to understand their background or current needs. Equally many debates at national and global levels about what should be the fate of displaced and refugee children take place without ever consulting or listening to them. All-too-often children are simply 'spoken for', and even where those speaking on their behalf are representing their best interests, it is rare that children and young people are at the forefront of these discussions.

War Child has sought to address this deficit by establishing its 'VoiceMore' programme – an advocate development training programme that seeks to build the confidence of children and young people displaced by conflict to speak up for their rights. A group of refugee girls War Child trained in Jordan highlighted education, child safety, early marriage, child labour and family reunification as some of the most important issues that require far more attention. Listening to the needs and experiences of children and young people forced to flee allows the international community to better tailor responses and advocate on their behalf.

*"Of equal importance is for adults around the child to listen to what he/she says and wants, which helps to prevent children from going missing from the system. Securing these rights is therefore vital for the protection of and assistance to children on the move"*

**ENOC TASK FORCE, CHILDREN ON THE MOVE**





## **PART 3: ACTION PLAN**

**TOWARDS A GLOBAL ACTION  
PLAN FOR CHILDREN FORCED  
TO FLEE**



PHOTO: LOUIS LEESON

**“THE POLITICIANS SAID AFTER THE DEATHS IN MY FAMILY: ‘NEVER AGAIN’. EVERYONE CLAIMED THEY WANTED TO DO SOMETHING BECAUSE OF THE PHOTO THAT TOUCHED THEM SO MUCH. BUT WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW? PEOPLE ARE STILL DYING AND NOBODY IS DOING ANYTHING ABOUT IT.”**

**ALAN KURDI’S FATHER, ABDULLAH**

There are core rights which should be upheld for every child, wherever they are. Yet too often they are being denied, and the problem looks set only to worsen as the number of displaced children continues to grow. To ensure the five key rights outlined in this paper are truly ‘immovable’ in practice requires a redoubling of financial and political commitment globally to displaced children. This can be achieved through collective, coordinated and concerted efforts by world leaders to prioritise their needs, through developing a Global Action Plan which would at a minimum deliver the following commitments.

### **1. NO CHILD FORCED TO FLEE IS OUT OF SCHOOL FOR MORE THAN ONE MONTH - MOBILISING \$4BN FOR EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES BY 2020.**

Around 3.5 million refugee children are out of school. The education of displaced children is disrupted for months – if not years – on end. Though there are multiple factors which contribute to displaced children missing out on school – including weak capacity in conflict-affected and host countries, and poor coordination across humanitarian actors – the most significant challenge is a financial one.

On average, education receives less than 2% of total humanitarian aid committed through UN appeals, and the education sector routinely receives less than half of requested funds to meet education needs<sup>72</sup>. In the countries where the largest number of refugees originate, as well as those with the largest number of newly displaced people, education is the least funded sector of humanitarian response in at least a third of cases – for example in Iraq the education needs of the emergency UN response remained 73% underfunded in 2015.



PHOTO: RICHARD POHLE

Mobilising the necessary finance to support quality education provision for children forced to flee would significantly advance progress towards the target of no displaced child being out of school for more than 30 days. The launch of the Education Cannot Wait fund at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 represented a significant step forwards in catalyzing the necessary resources for education in emergencies, however it is critical that this fund does not just remain an empty shell. A modest requirement to make the fund successful is to mobilise close to \$4 billion by 2020, with the required year-on-year cumulative pledges outlined below:

<b>Projected growth in funding to meet ambition</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Year 5</b>	<b>Total for first 5 years</b>
<b>Total children and young people</b>	<b>1,360,000</b>	<b>3,400,000</b>	<b>6,120,000</b>	<b>9,520,000</b>	<b>13,600,000</b>	<b>34,000,000</b>
<b>Total funding required (\$)</b>	<b>\$154 million</b>	<b>\$385 million</b>	<b>\$694 million</b>	<b>\$1.08 billion</b>	<b>\$1.54 billion</b>	<b>\$3.85 billion</b>

Source: Global Campaign for Education (2016), The Fierce Urgency of Now  
[http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/The\\_Fierce\\_Urgency\\_of\\_Now.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/The_Fierce_Urgency_of_Now.pdf)



**“A girl could leave her schooling because of her parents’ way of thinking and beliefs. She might also face harassment from males, because it is a camp and no one knows anyone.”**

**ZARA, SYRIAN GIRL IN JORDAN, CONSULTED THROUGH WAR CHILD’S VOICEMORE PROGRAMME**





PHOTO: WAR CHILD UK

## **2. CHILD PROTECTION FUNDING REQUESTS IN UN APPEALS ARE FULLY FUNDED - WITH NO PROJECT FAILING FOR LACK OF FINANCE.**

In 2009, Child Protection had the second highest level of underfunding after the education sector and the 2008/2009 data revealed that Gender-Based Violence projects, trafficking and migration and child labour were least funded of all within this<sup>73</sup>. Whilst more recent comprehensive data is lacking on the level of support to child protection within humanitarian appeals, the figures on UN appeals for the largest countries of origin of refugees – and with the largest newly displaced – are revealing (see Figures 1 and 2). Protection (which includes child protection as a sub-sector) was among the top underfunded response areas in 50% of all cases – and was always funded at less than 20% against requests.

According to the data available, child protection is consistently de-prioritised as a sector within humanitarian response, prompting the conclusion that the international community is consistently failing to respond to and address the unique vulnerabilities of children fleeing conflict. Where child protection needs are identified in emergency situations, their implementation should not fail due to lack of finance, and any Global Action Plan should aim for at least a 100% reduction in the cases of underfunding of child protection needs in emergencies by 2020.

## **3. NO CHILD FORCED TO FLEE IS CRIMINALISED - BY COMMITTING TO ELIMINATE CHILD DETENTION OF DISPLACED MINORS.**

No child is illegal. In contravention of the 1951 Refugee Convention, children are being systematically criminalised for their status as refugees, not only leading to extreme trauma for the children involved, but adding the stigma of criminality to children and young people who are already acutely vulnerable. Many children are held in prison-like facilities with no access to basic services, not separated from adults (which brings the risk of sexual violence and abuse) and experience abuse by authorities<sup>74</sup>.

UNHCR's 2014-2019 '*Global Strategy to support governments to end the detention of asylum-seekers and refugees*' identified 12 priority countries for action on ending child detention. As a result, the number of children detained in 2014, 164,248, fell by 15% in 2015. All of the focus countries achieved a decrease in the number of children detained during the reporting period, except for the UK and Mexico. The interim report from UNHCR established that the number of children detained in the UK remained the same from 2014 to 2015, with no reduction at all, noting that despite its promise in 2010 to end the practice, the UK government had incarcerated 47 children that year<sup>75 76</sup>.

A Global Action Plan must commit to end the scandal of detention of displaced and refugee children by 2020.



PHOTO: DAVID BEBBER

#### **4. COUNTRIES COMMIT TO RESETTLE A FAIR SHARE OF REFUGEE CHILDREN – PARTICULARLY UNACCOMPANIED MINORS - AND GUARANTEE SAFE AND LEGAL ROUTES FOR CHILDREN FORCED TO FLEE.**

Responsibility for hosting the vast majority of the world's child refugees falls disproportionately on Africa and Asia, with Turkey hosting the highest number of child refugees overall<sup>77</sup>, and Jordan and Lebanon hosting the highest density of child refugees relative to their population<sup>78</sup>. Lebanon's 1.1 million refugees – of which 50% are children - means that one in every five people in the country is a refugee under UNHCR's mandate. In Jordan nearly 10% of the population is a refugee. By comparison in the United States, just 1 in 1200 people is a refugee, in the UK 1 in 530.

This throws into stark relief the need to establish a more equitable system for refugee settlement globally, whereby richer countries would take a fairer share of refugees. Such a system would be assisted by the establishment of more widespread and accessible avenues to seek safe and legal asylum – for example through making humanitarian visa applications more accessible for children and their families via embassies abroad<sup>79</sup>.

The responsibility especially of EU countries in this regard is demonstrated even more acutely by the figures relating to unaccompanied minors. In 2015, 98,400 asylum applications were lodged by unaccompanied or separated children across 78 countries (the majority Afghan, Eritrean, Syrian, and Somali children). This was the highest number on record since UNHCR started collecting such data a decade ago<sup>80</sup>, and of these, 90,000 were unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Europe - the vast majority (39.9%) were to Sweden, followed by Germany (16.3%), Hungary (9.9%) and Austria (9.3%). Despite the fact that these are among the most vulnerable children, and that even the stark increase in asylum applications represents only a tiny fraction of the number of children hosted by countries like Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, their cases are still routinely rejected. For example the UK, despite receiving only 3.4% of applications<sup>81</sup>, has rejected 70% of asylum applications from children.



**“Parents are forced to let their children work at a young age - so that they can help with household expenses.”**

**NIESHA, SYRIAN GIRL IN JORDAN, CONSULTED THROUGH WAR CHILD'S VOICEMORE PROGRAMME**



PHOTO: JAMES MARCUS HANEY

Year	2013	2014	2015
Asylum applications	12,725	23,150 (up 81% from 2013)	88,245 (up 281% from 2014)

**Figure 3: Asylum application to the EU (28 countries) from unaccompanied minors**

Despite the exponential increase in the number of unaccompanied minors, mostly from conflict affected and fragile states, shockingly, the EU has failed to renew its *2010–2014 Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors*, which presents an unacceptable risk that unaccompanied children will become even more neglected<sup>82</sup>. The ‘EU Agenda for Migration’ guides Member States and EU institutions in handling mass movements of people, and, despite the majority demographic often being children, it does not make a single mention of children<sup>83</sup>, except for a cursory reference in a footnote. A Global Action Plan must seek to address these deficiencies.





PHOTO: RICHARD POHLE

# CONCLUSION



PHOTO: WAR CHILD UK

This report has drawn attention to the unfolding crisis facing children forced to flee, which means that on current trends 63 million children will be displaced by 2025. The humanitarian system is already failing displaced children in many cases – with chronic under-funding of emergency responses in the countries of origin of millions of displaced and refugee children, and consistent deprioritisation of education and protection. Without a step-change in the way the international community deals with children on the move, the problem risks spiralling out of control.

This is despite the fact that the rights of children are enshrined in multiple international laws, and that even when they make the impossible decision to flee their home, their rights should stay with them as they move. The right to be free from persecution, exploitation and abuse; to be free from fear and discrimination; to have access to a quality education; to be able to have a family life; and to participate and be heard – these are innate rights that shouldn't be abandoned simply because a child has been forced to flee either within a country or beyond its borders.

It is the collective responsibility of the international community to ensure that these core rights are upheld, and the development of a Global Action Plan for children forced to flee would enable world leaders to advance some critical actions to help fulfil children's basic rights – through mobilising a significant increase in resources for education; ensuring no child protection efforts fail for lack of finance; committing to end the criminalisation of displaced children through detention; and ensuring all countries resettle a fair share of displaced children.

Such an action plan would help galvanise collective efforts for children forced to flee, and redouble political and financial commitment to better guarantee their rights. To avoid a lost generation of children and young people, whose lives have been torn apart by conflict, persecution and insecurity through no fault of their own, this feels like a small price to pay.



**“The children of Syria are like fish in water. Syria is the water; we cannot live without it. We only ask you for one thing. Try to end the war soon for us because we are tired. Now we can no longer find a place to rest. Some travel, and some are away from their families. But we are always sure that Syria is the one thing that brings us all together”.**

**FATIMA, SYRIAN GIRL IN JORDAN, CONSULTED THROUGH WAR CHILD'S VOICEMORE PROGRAMME**



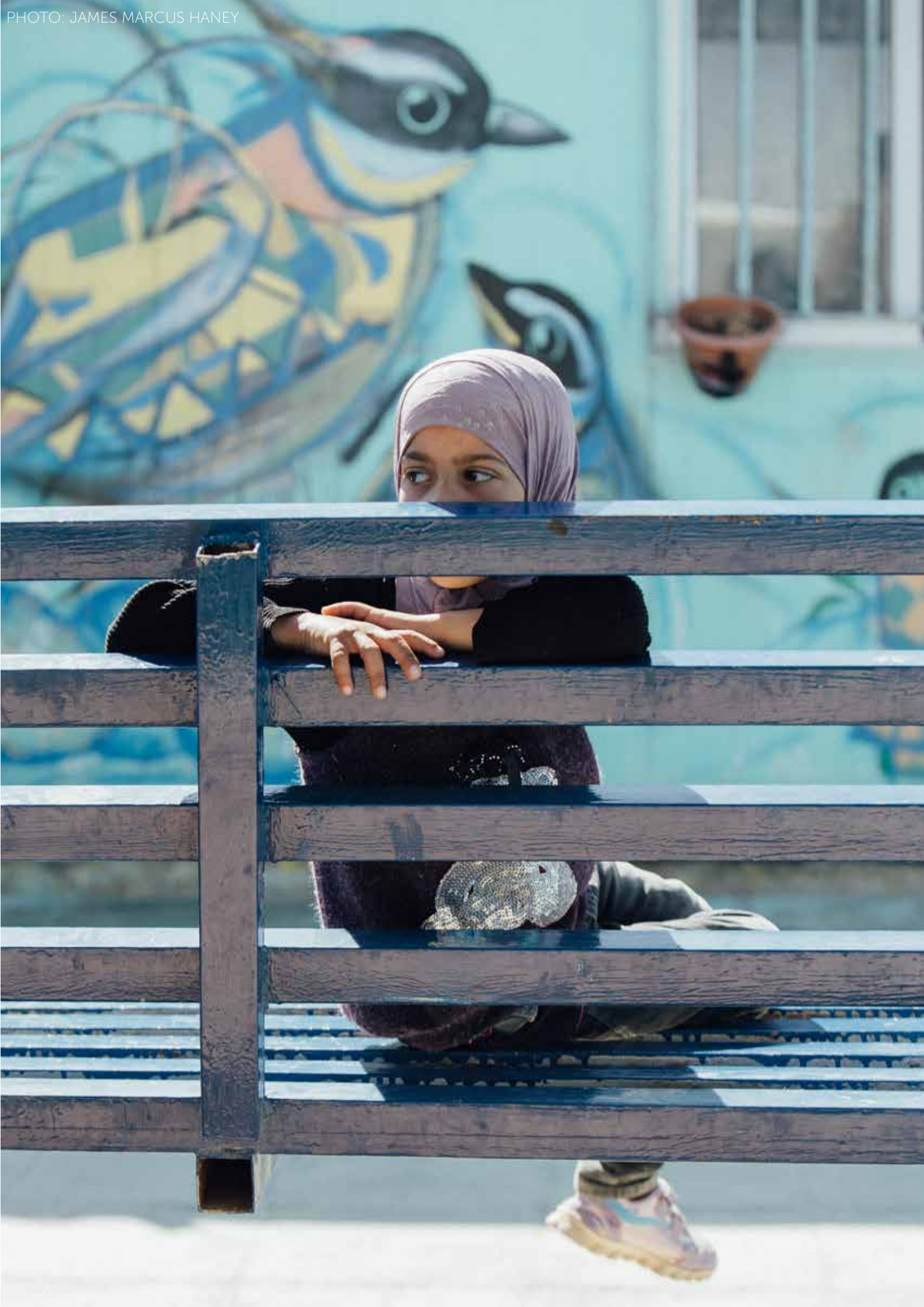
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