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THE PROTECTION OF MIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
BY UNICEF

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“... I have never understood why some people are lucky enough to be born with the chance that I had, to have this path in life, and why across the world there’s a woman just like me, with the same abilities and same desires, the same work ethic and love for her family, who would most likely make better films and better speeches, only she sits in a refugee camp and she has no voice. She worries about what her children will eat, how to keep them safe, and if they’ll ever be allowed to return home. I don’t know why this is my life and that’s hers. I don’t know that. But I will do as my mother asked, and I will do the best I can with this life to be of use. ...”

Jolie, A. (2013): Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award acceptance speech.

1.Foreword

Dear reader,

I invite you to a beautiful journey to explore something that lets you believe in humanity again, a case in which we all hope to succeed. Children are the future and the joy of our lives, to provide the same chances and opportunities is impossible, but helping those in great danger and disadvantage is a great step for a better world.

Personally, children play an extremely important role as I see the world. I was a volunteer for 2 years at KórházSuli, an organisation working to help sick children study and keep up academically with their peers. I find it very pleasing to know and experience that there are people out there with a golden heart who are actively doing something for the greater good.

In today's world, with millions leaving their countries in the hopes of a better, safer life, children are affected as well. Wars are leaving children homeless, traumatised, injured, orphans and without a chance for education, Without a chance at life.

The innocent youth should not be the one to pay the price for all the ugliness of the world.

With this thesis, I hope to raise awareness and bring to light the importance and the severity of the situation.

Children might not be the first priority for our world leaders, but they sure are for UNICEF.

2. Introduction

2.a Importance of the study

My research is related to numerous fields, such as human rights, migrant crisis, migrant policy, rights of the child and child protection. I will examine the legal framework of refugee child protection, therefore international law can be mentioned as an academic background as well. The main focus of my study is on the protection of refugee/migrant children's rights by UNICEF. Talking about child protection in general, UNICEF is a major actor. The organisation takes initiatives regarding every child, regardless of their background, therefore refugee children are included as well. Protecting these children's rights has gotten an incredible amount of attention in the past few years. However, the efficiency of UNICEF's work related to this field is unclear. The organisation plays a crucial role in the protection of refugee children's rights all over the world. Although UNICEF developed several programmes and initiatives, deep research on the efficiency of these measures in practice is still missing from the technical literature. There are also very few studies explaining the problems and challenges UNICEF faces when it comes to providing protection to these children, nor studies looking into the long-term effects highlighting how the organisation's work influences the life and future of the young refugees.

My research is on the edge of children's rights and migrant politics. Nowadays the international migration and migrants' rights are becoming more and more important. UNICEF takes a crucial role in this when it comes to the affected children. Examining UNICEF's work and how effectively it is applied in practice can give us a better understanding of the importance of this topic and solutions for the future. This research could be helpful for decision makers and other active organisations protecting the rights of refugee children. The common goal is to make the living conditions better for these children.

2.b Objectives and scope

This present study endeavours to elucidate the role of UNICEF in the protection of the refugee and migrant youth while focusing on how the organisation contributes to improving their quality of life. I will examine the support mechanisms, programmes, the legal instruments employed by UNICEF and will demonstrate their impact on vulnerable children. The case

studies will showcase the results and accomplishments made for refugee children, as well as the challenges UNICEF has to face in implementation.

The paper is aimed to find answers to the following research questions:

- How effective are the measures taken by UNICEF in refugee child protection?
- What legal frameworks support UNICEF's activities in protecting migrant and refugee minors?
- How does UNICEF contribute to shaping national and international migrant policies?

The research's global scope encompasses selected case studies from different regions, focusing on the developments. UNICEF's actions aligning with international conventions and national policies, and how these initiatives translate into long-term benefits for refugee children will be presented as well.

2.c Methodology

1. Qualitative and quantitative method

During my study, I will use the qualitative method to answer most of my research questions. I will gather specific documents containing information regarding my chosen question and use the gathered information to give an informative explanation to answer. However, in the case of the question; "How effective are the measures taken by UNICEF in refugee child protection?", I will use the quantitative method to gather the necessary data about the successes and failures of these initiatives. After analysing, I will be able to draw a conclusion to provide the proper answer based on the data.

2. Primer or secondary method

In my research, between the primer and secondary methods, the latter will be used since the sources will be documents and studies that already exist. I will use specific sections and parts of these sources that are needed to complete my thesis. These documents and studies don't necessarily focus on refugee child protection but cover topics that are included in my paper.

3. Inductive or deductive approach

Inductive and deductive research approaches are both appropriate for my work, however, the inductive approach is more dominant as the nature of my research requires. The reason is that I draw conclusions from the already existing documents. Although, some points of view can be

approached in a deductive style as well, for example, the success of specific measures initiated by UNICEF.

4. Other methods

Further methods will be used as well throughout my paper, such as fundamental research as the intelligence gathering on certain topics are based on fundamental theories to further expand the focus of my topic. To prove already existing measures, the method to be considered is theory-confirming.

2.d Literature review

Migration is a global crisis today affecting millions of children forcing them to leave their homes behind. This situation is a major issue in academic research. Institutional and academic literature widely acknowledges that migrant and refugee minors face heightened vulnerabilities compared to their non-migrant peers. These children are in a special situation with special needs. Migrant children experience separation from their caregivers, and disruption not only in their education but in their development as well. They are exposed to long-term health issues, and they lack access to healthcare services. They are exposed to numerous traumatic events throughout their journey, causing many mental disorders that stay untreated as well since they have no opportunities to receive any psychosocial support, leaving them with life-long scars. With little to no safety at all, there is a high risk of trafficking, sexual exploitation, forced labour and other forms of persistent violence. There is not enough legal protection to ensure the safety of these minors leading to exploitation, detention, and deportation.

Legal frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provide a comprehensive set of rights for all children and establish children, including migrants and refugees as independent rights-holders, regardless of their status. However, even today the Convention isn't fully implemented or widely understood.

This study examines the academic literature on the intersection of child protection, international law, migration and the role of UNICEF and also how national policies on migration change due to UNICEF's work.

The CRC is the most important international legal framework that the academic literature focuses on. The Convention makes it a strong foundation for safeguarding refugee and asylum-seeking children (Lawrence, 2019). Despite it being the most ratified document on human

rights, its enforcement heavily relies on national implementation, which can vary by country. Article 22 of the CRC obliges states to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to children seeking refugee status, but the national migration law and other complications like such limit the application (Vaghri, 2019). Gerson, Al Marzooqi, and Argyriades (2024) dig a little deeper in their study and they point out that international legal commitments are frequently weakened by political interests, security concerns, or administrative capacity, which prevents organizations like UNICEF from fully executing their mandates.

As a response, international agreements such as the Global Compact for Migration (2018) and the Global Compact on Refugees (2018) (UNICEF, n.d., K) were created to reaffirm and expand child-specific protections. UNICEF played a key role in both compacts' shaping, providing a child-sensitive approach to migration. The organisation aims to end child immigration detention, ensure access to education and proper healthcare services, and strengthen legal guardianship systems (UNICEF, n.d., K). Gerson and their colleagues (2024) recognise these efforts but argue that global frameworks like these often lack enforcement mechanisms and fail to outline practical, and specific strategies for local, and national implementations. While these frameworks may seem progressive on paper, there is limited academic research on their tangible impact on community or migrant children level.

Regarding UNICEF's programmatic role, the agency has launched many initiatives addressing child displacement, including the Blue Dot Safe Spaces, the School-in-a-Box programme, along child-friendly spaces in refugee camps. These are often mentioned in institutional reports. Anyhow, academic evaluations tracking their effectiveness remain scarce. While the UNICEF-IOM Technical Note (UNICEF, 2024) outlines practices for integrating migrant children into national child protection systems, studies that track outcomes or the long-term benefits of the interventions are critically minimal. Migrant children are still experiencing developmental delays, trauma, and systemic exclusion from essential services, even with these well-intentioned programmes (Vaghri et al., 2019).

In one of the field-based studies, the migration of children crossing the Darién Gap in Latin America is demonstrated to provide a clear idea of the dangers these minors face during their journey. These children are exposed to health risks, abuse, and exploitation, often with no effective support from state or international actors (Naranjo et al., 2023). UNICEF is mentioned in the response strategies in Naranjo's study, but it doesn't provide an in-depth assessment of the agency's successes or limitations, which reflects a wider gap in the academic literature.

Equivalently, Gerson et al. (2024) argue that the organisation's success is measured in output, rather than outcome.

In Hungarian context, there have only been a very few studies done focusing on UNICEF's presence or activity, although relevant data can be drawn from broader policy and legal critiques. Haraszti (2015) and Kálmán (2019) look into the situation of unaccompanied minors in Hungary. According to these two studies, there are major gaps in legal protection and systemic barriers to accessing child welfare services. They support the idea that while UNICEF works with local governments, there is a need for more academic analysis to get a wider picture of how these efforts appear in practice. In addition, Ripszám (2023) highlights the persistent threat of child trafficking and the need for targeted interventions for unaccompanied minors' arrival.

To sum it up, the academic literature establishes the legal and institutional framework of child protection in migration but still leaves unanswered questions regarding the practical impact of UNICEF's work. While there is consensus that the agency plays a crucial, central role in advocacy, capacity building and service delivery, the critical assessment of the organisation's effectiveness, limitations, and long-term influence is still limited. My thesis aims to contribute to this unexplored area by presenting global case studies, policy documents, and available data to evaluate how UNICEF's child protection strategies function and what challenges must be addressed to ensure migrant children's rights are not only recognised but realized at the same time.

3. UNICEF: An overview

3.a History and Establishment

To contextualize the history of UNICEF, we first need to understand how children's role and the thought of them changed over the years which led to the creation of UNICEF to be possible. Childhood wasn't an accepted phase, up until the age of civilization when childhood and adulthood were clearly separated from one another. Children were considered just as responsible and capable as an adult way before. Society thought of a person as a child as long as he or she wasn't able to take care of herself/himself, as soon as someone was able to do so, all kinds of responsibilities were expected from them. With the introduction of the age of civilization, children started to lose their responsibilities along with their freedom. Parents started to consider education more and more important in their children's upbringing. Society's goal became to shape the youth through the educational systems. This new point of view and awareness led to the realisation that adults and children have different needs. This recognition is the very beginning of modern child protection. UNICEF was established in the process of child protection rights development into international awareness (Varga,2023).

The integration of basic human rights was the starting pillar of child protection on the international scene. The first predecessor of UNICEF was the first Geneva Declaration, which was created by Eglantyne Jebb, a British reformer after the First World War. The Declaration stated 5 fundamental rights for children;

1. The child must be placed in a position to develop in a regular way, both physically and mentally.
2. The starving child must be fed, the ill one to be cared for; the stunted child must be brought forward, the lost guided back, the orphan and the abandoned must be taken up and educated.
3. In times of crisis, the child may be the first to be helped.
4. The child must be prepared to provide for their livelihood and be protected from all forms of exploitation.
5. The child must be raised aware that their abilities are to the service of their fellow human beings. (Varga, 2023)

The goal was to start a movement that recognised children's rights after seeing the chaos with refugee children the war created. Concurrently, Eglantyne Jebb also established the

organisation called „Save the Children” in 1919. She developed a collection of rules, the Chart of Children, which was accepted by the predecessor of the League of Nations, in 1924. This is what is known as the Geneva Declaration today, containing basic rights for children, protecting their well-being, and inspiring states and governments to join national forces considering the importance of child protection. However, this Declaration did not contain any obligations, it even lost its legal basis with the dissolution of the League of Nations.

Later on, with the establishment of the UN, the recreation of this Declaration wasn't in focus, yet provisions for family and child protection were made.

With the Second World War, the world became a terrible place for children, similarly to after the first war. Children were sick and starving worldwide. In response to this situation, the United Nations General Assembly founded the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, UNICEF as an acronym, in 1946, on the 11th of December. It was created as a temporary organisation with the aim of helping children suffering from the war. The organisation was renamed in 1953 to the United Nations Children's Fund, UN Children's Fund for short, although the organisation is still known as the first acronym; UNICEF (Varga, 2023).

In 1959, the Second Geneva Declaration was created, which still had no obligations, but focused more on child protection, and emphasised the thought of strengthening children's rights. It fortified human rights, human dignity for children, and further stated the special protection and care of children's intellectual and physical development and acknowledged that all children have the right to a happy childhood and laid down rights and freedoms which parents, governments and individuals must recognise (Varga, 2023).

Comparing the two Geneva Declarations, taking the time that had passed into consideration, an enormous change can be noticed in the relations of human rights and state involvement: with the second declaration, states increased responsibility in the form of recommendation, as for the first one it was just a suggestion. Although the second Geneva Declaration did not cover all areas of children's rights, nor set out specific tasks for states, it was a clear indication that international regulations are much needed. Regulations that go beyond human rights, and stress children's rights. The protection of the emotional well-being of children was mentioned for the first time ever in this document, which was a big step towards mindfulness about the needs of children (Varga, 2023).

In 1979, “Children's International Year” took place, organised by the UN, with the goal to honour the 20th anniversary of the first Geneva Declaration. Drawing attention to the rights of

children and all the problems related to minors was the intention of the year with the hopes of finding solutions. Festivities were organised all over the world as states and organisations strengthened their commitment to these rights. The year had a significant role for governments to have topics on their agenda that otherwise would have been avoided, due to their international presence. These topics included children of the streets, child work, juvenile offenders, and sexual harassment. As a consequence of all the efforts of 1979, in the next year, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights convened a working group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). After 10 years of hard work, CRC entered into force in 1990 and was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. All states of the world have ratified the convention, except the USA. The purpose of this document is to urge states to take an active role in children's well-being, ensuring their rights and well-being, and to harmonise them which is scattered in different international legal contracts (Varga, 2023).

3.b Mission and vision

Since its establishment, UNICEF has been dedicated to improving the lives of children and their families worldwide. Headquartered in New York City, the organization provides humanitarian aid and long-term development assistance, primarily in developing countries. To achieve its objectives, UNICEF relies on funding from private donors and government contributions. Operating in over 190 countries and territories, UNICEF works to ensure access to education, healthcare, and nutrition, while also advocating for policies that protect children from violence, exploitation, and abuse. Additionally, the organization plays a crucial role in providing clean water and sanitation services for those in need. As the world's largest provider of vaccines, it also manages the largest humanitarian warehouse, enabling rapid, life-saving help and hope (UNICEF, n.d., H).

From the eyes of the organization, every child is the same, regardless of their race, their age, or their heritage, all have an equal right to a safe, fulfilling childhood. (UNICEF, n.d., H).

Guided by these values, UNICEF is committed to ensuring that children's rights are universally protected.

3.c Key achievements

Over the years, the organisation has managed to achieve major change and progress towards its objectives. Some of their most recent accomplishments include leadership in global health initiatives, provision of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, activities in child health and nutrition, as well as in education and child protection, finally, UNICEF managed to reduce child mortality rates.

In 2020, UNICEF provided access to WASH services and supplies for 106 million people, including 58 million children (UNICEF, 2021).

In 2021, the organisation led the procurement and delivery of COVID-19 vaccines. With the contribution of COVAX (Covid-19 Vaccine Global Access), 958 million doses were delivered to 144 countries. This year, 48.6 million out-of-school children were helped to access education, including 6.4 million children on the move and 31.7 million children in humanitarian settings (UNICEF, 2022, C).

In 2023, along with several significant achievements, UNICEF provided over 150 million children with services for the early detection and treatment of child wasting, one of the deadliest forms of malnutrition, with the help of a new partnership; Community Health Delivery Partnership. 2023 also brought a great fall in the global under 5 mortality rate by 51% since the 2000s (UNICEF, n.d., O).

3.d Evolution of its role in child protection

The role of UNICEF in child protection has undergone a significant transformation since its establishment in 1946. This process can be broken down into 5 sections;

1. Founding and early humanitarian role (1946-1950s)
2. Shift to long-term development (1950s-1970s)
3. Rights-based approach and the CRC (1980s-1990s)
4. System strengthening and global strategy (2000s-2010s)
5. Modern strategies and current focus (2015- present)

The organisation started as an emergency fund, as I have mentioned before, to help children affected by World War II. It provided support in health, food, clothes, and safety. From 1947 to 1965, Maurice Pate, the Executive Director, expanded UNICEF's work to meet the needs of children in a more holistic way (UNICEF,2018, D).

In 1950, the United Nations General Assembly extended UNICEF's mandate due to the necessity for continued action to relieve the suffering of children, and emphasised support for children outside Europe. 3 years later, UNICEF became a permanent UN agency. At this time, the organization started projects in water, sanitation, and hygiene to reduce preventable childhood diseases and death. In 1959, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child defined children's rights to protection, education, healthcare, shelter, and good nutrition. The organisation started to expand its focus and implemented aid for education programmes globally (UNICEF, 2018, D).

Following the Bellagio Conference, which focused on ways to link children's wellbeing to national development plans, UNICEF transitioned from being a relief fund to an international development agency. In the subsequent years, multiple aids were provided such as aid for family support in 1967, for mothers and children in civil conflicts in Nigeria and Vietnam in 1968, and for non-formal education in 1973. In 1971, UN agencies mobilised to provide shelter, food, sanitation supplies and water to millions of refugees who fled what is now Bangladesh (UNICEF, 2018, D).

The Alma-Ata conference took place in 1978, which was convened by UNICEF and WHO brought world attention to primary healthcare and emphasised community-based approaches to family health as the keys to achieving an acceptable level of health worldwide (UNICEF, 2018, D).

The next year had a significant meaning in the history of UNICEF since the organisation declared the year to be the International Year of the Child. Because it has a non-political status, UNICEF was able to work with the Red Cross in major operations all across Kampuchea (now Cambodia) (UNICEF, 2018, A).

Entering the 1980s, UNICEF's commitment to child protection moved into a transformative phase with the launch of the Child Survival and Development Revolution in 1982, followed by numerous significant initiatives. The establishment of the International Child Development Centre in 1988 to oversee research for children at the historic Innocenti building in Florence (UNICEF, 2018, A). In 1989, the adoption of the CRC by 159 UN member states represented a pivotal point in international law, with it being the most universally approved human rights treaty for the protection of children. This was carried forward with the 1990 World Summit for Children, where the global leaders adopted the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. A few years later, with the contribution of UNESCO UNICEF

invented and distributed the School-in-a-Box, which showcases the shift towards ensuring continuity in education for children in need. In 1995, the Graça Machel Report, titled The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children brought light to the effects of war on young lives and emphasized the necessity for special protection measures. In 1999, the intervention to deliver vaccines and other urgent health services for children in conflicts was implemented by UNICEF, WHO and OCHA (UNICEF, 2018, B).

Moving into the 2000s, a special session was held by the UN General Assembly to review progress on the goals set by the 1990 World Summit for Children. 2 years later, UNICEF organised a rapid humanitarian response with partners to the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, (UNICEF, 2018, B). and in 2010 after 7 earthquakes, the organisation led the international response on behalf of children (UNICEF, 2021, A).

UNICEF joined the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) in 2012 taking measures to greater transparency in its work. The adoption of mobile technology into humanitarian logistics in 2015, made faster and more efficient distribution of medicine and supplies possible providing enormous guidance during the Ebola crisis in West Africa. In 2018, the Generation Unlimited was launched at the UN General Assembly, aiming to expand education, vocational training, and employment opportunities for young people. The next year marked the 30th anniversary of the ratification of the CRC.

In 2020, with the case of COVID-19, UNICEF took an important role in the distribution of vaccines with COVAX (UNICEF, 2021, A).

These milestones illustrate the dynamic evolution of UNICEF from provider of emergency aid to a global leader in child rights and protection, responding to the world's most challenging situations with innovation, advocacy, and commitment to children's wellbeing.

4. UNICEF's engagement with migrants

4.a Background context

According to UNICEF's Children on the Move report (2018), as of 2016, 1 in 80 children were living in forced displacement. One of the most shocking data I found in this report is that in that same year, 23 million children were living in internal displacement, from which 7 million children were forced to leave due to some kind of natural disaster. Comparing these numbers helps us associate the seriousness of the situation; in 2024, Hungary's total population was 9.5 million (European Union, n.d.).

The reason for migration can be due to many factors, such as exploitation, persistent violence, extreme poverty, climate change and natural disasters, and persistent conflicts. Almost 1 in 10 children live in an environment that is affected by armed conflicts, and more than 400 million minors live in extreme poverty. Migration is seriously dangerous, especially for vulnerable children; between 2014 and 2018, there were more than 26,000 migrant deaths (UNICEF, 2018). The number of children being affected by the migrant crises is enormous and their situation is not taken seriously enough.

4.b Initial steps and initiatives

UNICEF sees every child the same. They say a child is a child no matter where they come from, their religion, nationality, or anything else. A child will always be a child, even if their situation forces them into migration. UNICEF has done several programmes to ensure migrant children's lives are more child-friendly, at least as far as the circumstances allow. UNICEF Director of Data, Research and Policy, Laurence Chandy adopted the Global Compact for Migration in 2018, which provides states with tool that helps them better meet the rights of minors entering their countries. This translates as a help to protect, integrate, and empower all children, all while not creating any further obligations. This Compact grants better access not only to education but health care services as well (UNICEF, 2018).

According to the UNICEF Statement on the Global Compact for Migration (2018) report, more than 100 countries still have policies of migration detention for children. The agency's challenge is to take the next step and move beyond the acknowledgement of the vulnerability of migrant children to maximise their roles in development and prosperity. UNICEF aims for better engagement and gives them the opportunity to have a voice, and listen to what they need

and what they are worried about. Having a closer relationship with these children, understanding what they are going through and knowing what a true help for them would be helps UNICEF to provide what matters. The true obligation of the organisation is to make migration safe for everyone, which is hard to achieve. As one of UNICEF's youth delegates, Yasmin said, "Migration policies that work for youth, and children, work for all". To make this possible UNICEF is working with Member States, UN agencies, local authorities, and civil society (UNICEF, 2018).

4.c Global need for UNICEF's intervention

Migration is no longer a regional issue but a global problem. The scale of child displacement shows just how necessary UNICEF's intervention has become. A movement called "A Call to Action: Protecting children on the move starts with better data" highlights a major challenge in migrant child protection; the lack of data. Only 56% of refugee data have information on age, and only 20% of countries and territories with data on conflict-related internally displaced individuals disaggregate the data by age. Overall, 77% of countries and territories have age-disaggregated migrant stock data, including only 57% in Africa (UNICEF, 2018, A).

5. UNICEF'S general work with migrants

5.a Scope of work

When it comes to the actual work in practice that UNICEF does to protect migrant children, many stay sceptical. Even though the protection of migrant minors is incredibly hard, especially in a way that makes a difference, UNICEF has managed to navigate cutting-edge methods to provide help wherever possible. It might seem little to some, but the smallest help can make a big difference in the lives of these children. But what is it exactly that UNICEF does?

The organization provides life-saving humanitarian supplies in refugee camps, and runs child-friendly spaces, where children can play and mothers can rest and feed their babies in private and where families can reunite. UNICEF supports national and local governments to enforce laws, policies, systems, and services that address the specific needs of migrant children. It also collects, analyses, and disseminates data to gather evidence about the situation and individual experiences of minors on the move. Keeping families together can prevent unnecessary dangers for children. The key objective is to end child immigration detention by helping governments place alternative community-, and family-based solutions (UNICEF, n.d., K).

5.b Key programs and initiatives

To make the goals come to life, UNICEF has created several programs. I am going to introduce 7 of them.

The first one is the Blue Dot hubs, which are established with the contribution of UNHCR and other partners. These hubs provide a safe space for refugees and other vulnerable people where they're welcomed with no discrimination. The hubs create a place where migrants can receive information, services, protection, and support. They have access to someone they can talk to, food, water, and blankets, along with other items that they may need. They can receive updated, reliable, and accurate information on how to access specific national protection services or how to reunite with their family, which is shared through numerous channels, in different languages, in child-friendly formats and also in digital forms. People can connect to the Wi-Fi provided at the hub to keep in touch with family members and, or search for information to help them plan the rest of their journey ahead. Children can play and rest, simply forget about all the changes going on in their lives and be children for a little while, and mothers have a private space to breastfeed and nurse (UNICEF, 2024, A).

At the Blue Dot hubs workers are professionals, trained social workers. There are also psychologists, counsellors, and legal aid providers present at these hubs to meet the needs of the arriving migrants. To give a brief description of what the program is, Blue Dot is a safe space providing legal aid and counselling, medical and mental health support, disability support, and support for survivors of violence or for those at risk of physical or psychological harm. It creates a chance for job orientation, and access to schools along with the already mentioned legal and other aids and information (UNICEF, 2024, A).

When it comes to establishing new hubs, the location for setups is where refugees arrive at border crossings and along anticipated routes of major refugee flows. These are often in conjunction with local municipalities in strategic urban areas or transport hubs like bus or train stations to help refugees at the highest level possible. Nearby can be found refugee registry on sites, reception facilities or cash distribution points. The movement and needs of the refugee population are carefully taken into account when locating the new set-up places for hubs. There are several already existing hubs; 6 in Slovakia, 1 in Slovenia, 5 in the Republic of Moldova and 1 on the border of Poland and Belarus (UNICEF, 2024, A)

School-in-a-Box is part of UNICEF's standard response in emergencies. The purpose of it is to ensure the continuation of children's education within the 72 hours of an emergency. But what is School-in-a-Box exactly? As its name suggests, it is a locked aluminium box containing supplies and materials for a teacher and up to 40 students. Along with the basic school supplies such as exercise books, pencils, erasers, and scissors, a wooden teaching clock, wooden cubes for counting, a wind-up/solar radio and a set of three laminated posters are added into the box. To make it even more useful, the lid can be turned into a blackboard with a special paint included in the box. These boxes are all culturally neutral and are often supplemented by locally purchased products, ensuring the ability for children to learn in the local language, but there are toys, games, and even musical instruments in the boxes to recreate the best experience of learning for children in emergencies. With the help of the box, and thanks to its nature, makeshift classrooms can be established almost anywhere. There is also a replenishment kit available, the School-in-a-Carton, which is the same, except it is without the lockable metal box (UNICEF, n.d., A).

UNICEF has been a global player in birth registration for more than 35 years. Birth registration has become a major issue worldwide. It is the first step towards receiving a birth certificate. The difference between the two is very simple; birth registration is the process of recording a

child's birth. It is a permanent, official record of a child's existence, which provides legal recognition of that child's identity. At a minimum, it includes the information of the place and time of birth and to whom the child belongs. A birth registration is a requirement to obtain a birth certificate, which is the paper issued by the state to the parent or caregiver as a result of the birth registration process. A birth certificate is essential for a child to be visible to their governments and not to miss out on public services that help secure their fundamental rights. The absence of this paper follows them into adulthood, since it is required for basic transactions like opening a bank account or registering to vote, or just simply entering the job market. Nearly a quarter of the world's children do not have any legal proof of their existence, because their births were never registered (UNICEF, n.d., B).

There can be numerous different reasons for this; most families live in poorer households, often where there is limited access to registration services. There are more than 100 countries without fully functioning civil registration systems. Families may not be able to afford, the fees registration comes with, or the travel to registration sites. Some parents are unaware or just don't understand the importance of having a birth registration. Sadly, in some countries, women don't have the same rights as men, which limits the chance for their children to receive a birth registration since these papers cannot be issued without the presence of the father. The problem is rooted in low-, and middle-income countries. There are approximately 150 million children with no legal documentation of their birth. UNICEF focuses on helping governments strengthen their civil registration systems, including increase in the number of service points where children can be registered, the development or update of birth registration policies, concurrently introducing innovations in registration technology and increasing community awareness about birth registration (UNICEF, n.d., B).

The agency partners with other sectors to achieve its objectives. These partner sectors are actors in health, social protection, and education. The goal is to integrate birth registration into their work. Between 2021 and 2023, UNICEF helped 144 million children to be registered and helped issue 127 million children a birth certificates. The progress in recent years is showing an improving tendency; from 60% of children under the age of 5 being registered according to data from 2000, nowadays it's 77% of children are registered (UNICEF, n.d., B).

Regarding Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE), the objective is to respond to abuse and exploitation in humanitarian situations and to develop effective prevention. To achieve this, the organisation enhances the capacity of social service workforces, supports families and

community-based groups in order to ensure the safety and protection of children, and provides leadership and coordination for all actors taking part in child protection. UNICEF provides child-friendly spaces like Blue Dot hubs which creates a sense of normality. To treat mental health and psychosocial problems, UNICEF aims to address the needs of children who are affected by the crisis. To make it possible, actors receive training and integrate support into existing child protection and education programs. Uprooted children face greater dangers; therefore, family reunification is in great focus. These children are identified by the agency and help trace their families for reunification. Migrant children are at risk of being recruited by armed groups, UNICEF works to prevent such action and supports the reintegration of previously recruited children into society. Children are exposed to explosive weapons in war zones, which destroy schools, water supplies and other key facilities as well, which UNICEF works to provide alternative versions and restore basic services while taking care of injured minors (UNICEF, n.d., P).

UNICEF also initiates a so-called “WASH” program which translates to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene. The agency provides clean water, emergency restrooms, handwashing stations and hygiene kits containing soap, menstrual products, and others. Ensuring quick access to WASH in humanitarian crises is essential. Building sustainable WASH systems for refugee and host communities and helping to prevent conflict over the resources by serving all who are affected are the long-term goals of UNICEF, along with adapting to the climate by investing in climate-resilient infrastructure and using solar-powered water pumps. This program helps to protect the safety, health, and dignity of children (UNICEF, n.d., C).

The U-Report program is a free, global social messaging platform which was launched in 2011, in Uganda. It is used in more than 76 countries with over 13 million users. The platform is accessible via SMS, Facebook, and Twitter. It makes two-way communication between people and UNICEF possible. Users can communicate their needs, problems, and opinions and receive information, along with support in return. The program empowers communities to raise their voices and improve their conditions (UNICEF, 2021, B).

Some of UNICEF’s key interventions to protect and strengthen migrant children’s mental health are the following: safe space for playtime and recovery, psychological first aid, and providing training opportunities for teachers, health and social workers as well as caregivers (UNICEF, n.d., D).

Altogether, UNICEF's key initiatives form a comprehensive response to the urgent needs of migrant and refugee minors and their families, ensuring not only their survival but their right to protection, education, dignity, and well-being.

5.c Geographic focus and priority regions

The regions most affected by migration are Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Europe and Central Asia and South Asia. This covers a significant number of countries.

Latin America faces increasing challenges regarding migration. According to the study of Gerson et al. (2024), mass migration is primarily driven by factors such as violence, extreme poverty, and the current political situation. Countries like Venezuela, El Salvador and Honduras have seen major outflows of families who are seeking safety and better living conditions. Transit and host countries like Colombia, Mexico and Peru are under pressure to provide humanitarian aid, protection, and services, with limited resources. The study emphasises the need for coordination and well-organised responses in the regions and strengthen child protection systems to better navigate the challenges (Gerson et al., 2024).

Since April 2023, Sudan has been experiencing a significant humanitarian crisis caused by violent conflict. The situation has been affecting children and disrupting essential services across the country. Almost 25 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, of which 14 million are minors. There's a great necessity for water, nutritional support, healthcare and protection services, and education. UNICEF delivers emergency WASH, food, health, and education supplies as response priorities. The agency provides child protection, support, and assistance for unaccompanied or separated children (UNICEF, 2024, B).

The high volume of children is on the move in Europe and Central Asia with the armed conflict in Ukraine and the current situation in Syria and Afghanistan the as main drivers set migration into movement. Children fleeing these regions face the same dangers as other migrant children do, with a growing anti-migrant sentiment and discrimination. Migrant minor groups are most likely unaccompanied and separated. UNICEF is focusing on ending immigration detention, establishing Blue Dot hubs, and running birth registration programs partnering with local governments, EU institutions and NGOs (UNICEF, n.d., F).

About 95 million people are facing life-threatening dangers across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. With ongoing armed conflicts in countries like Syria, Yemen, Sudan

and the State of Palestine, children are forced to leave their homes. UNICEF is providing emergency healthcare, nutrition, education, and protection services. The agency helps local partners to deliver rapid and effective humanitarian assistance (UNICEF, n.d., G).

In South Asia, approximately 87 million people, including 47 million children were in need of humanitarian assistance in 2015 due to climate-induced disasters, protracted crises, economic shocks, and sudden-onsets. The region hosts more than 2.5 million registered refugees. Most of the people on the move are in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In addition, 3.8 million refugees are internally displaced. UNICEF is focusing on this region with the same attitude and urgency as the regions I have described previously (UNICEF, n.d., H).

These are the most prioritised regions in UNICEF's agenda with millions of children on the move at the risk of numerous dangers and lifelong trauma. In these regions, migrant and refugee children are facing the highest risks in the largest and most complex child migration crises globally. The agency's objectives are driven by the necessity of humanitarian aid and the limited capacity of local systems to respond adequately.

6. Partnerships and Collaborations

6.a Key partners

UNICEF is heavily reliant on voluntary contributions. As previously mentioned in the preceding chapters, the agency collaborates with others to achieve its objectives. However, the manner in which partnerships are established with UNICEF remains to be elucidated. Individual supporters are encouraged to contribute to the cause through donations, voluntary work, or by serving as advocates for minors within their communities. The assistance UNICEF receives is provided by a variety of sources. In collaboration with the public sector, contributors include governments, international financial institutions, and multilateral organisations. In the private sector, relevant actors are constituted by the corporate sector and philanthropic foundations. In civil society partnerships, help is offered by a diverse group of associations which are independent of the public and for-profit sectors. These partnerships are designed to advance collective interests. It's crucial to consider the role of UN partnerships as well in this context. UNICEF works closely with other funds, programs, and specialised agencies with a view to enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations' development operations. The organisation provides support to countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (UNICEF, n.d., I).

6.b Case studies of successful partnerships

There have been several successful cases with joint forces to ensure the rights of refugee children are realised and protected. This section presents a few selected case studies which demonstrate the achievements of collaborations, reflecting UNICEF's ability to work jointly with its partners to create sustainable, child-focused solutions across a variety of sectors such as health, education, child protection and social inclusion.

One of the most impactful partnership initiatives in recent years is the Blueprint for Joint Action for Refugee Children. This is a commitment to accelerate joint efforts to promote and protect the rights of refugee children. The initiative was launched in 2020 by UNICEF and UNHCR, a UN agency for refugees. It aims to ensure the inclusion of refugees in national plans, budgets, and service delivery systems. The creation was strategically aligned with the Global Compact on Refugees, which will be further discussed in the next chapter, to seek sustainable and long-term solutions and just emergency aid. The sectoral focus is on education, WASH, and child

protection. The Blueprint Initiative was implemented in 10 countries. These are Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, and Rwanda. The listed countries are the hosts of 2.1 million refugee children (UNICEF, 2022).

A significant number of child refugees and migrants face an increased risk to health as they live in crowded and unhygienic environments during their journeys and at their destinations. Many come from countries with a broken healthcare system and travel with no access to healthcare at all. To this challenge, Southern and Southeast European countries represent a particular case. As a response, the “RM Child-Health” initiative was launched in 2020 with the collaboration of the Health Programme of the European Union. The EU funded the program with € 4.3 million. The aim is to improve the health of children on the move in six countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Serbia, and Spain. The objective of the program is to strengthen the capacity of national authorities to deliver healthcare to refugee and migrant children, to increase health literacy among these children by providing information to safeguard their health and help them make decisions about their medical well-being, and to strengthen the implementation of health policies by, as an example, the number of health workers with the skills and knowledge to support refugee and migrant children who need health care (UNICEF, n.d., J).

With the war in Ukraine, Hungary was faced with a situation of mass migration with thousands of refugees seeking safety. To handle the challenges migration exposes the host countries to, the Memorandum of Understanding was created. The document was signed in 2023 by Mátyás Hegyaljai, the Deputy State Secretary of the Hungarian Ministry of Interior, and Pilar Gonzalez Rams, the Emergency Coordinator for the UNICEF Refugee Response Office. Through collaboration, Hungary commits to providing child protection, child welfare, education, anti-trafficking, and health-related services for refugee children. According to Pilar Gonzalez Rams’ words, “The joint mission is reaching out to all children and families with the aim of providing services that best suit their circumstances.”, “UNICEF stands ready to support Hungary in its continued commitment to deliver results for children.”. The agency focuses on helping national and local capacities to provide quality services to both refugees and host communities. UNICEF’s Emergency Response Office in Hungary was established in 2022 to assist in addressing the needs of refugees arriving from Ukraine. The result of this partnership is remarkable; over 40,000 refugees have been reached with essential services, and 85% of these people are women and children (UNICEF, 2023).

These case studies showcase how stratified partnerships are crucial to UNICEF's ability to address the needs of migrant children. Collaborative efforts ensure the responses are more sustainable, inclusive, and impactful. The partnerships not only strengthen service delivery but also promote long-term systemic change that upholds children's rights all over the world.

7. Rights protecting migrant children

7.a International conventions and agreements

International law is a consequential factor in protecting the rights of refugee and migrant children. These laws help secure their status, and obligate states to uphold to provide the rights they are entitled to. From the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), which I have briefly described in previous chapters, to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the more recent Global Compacts, several legal instruments define the obligations of states and the rights of children in migration context. This chapter provides an overview of these key documents. Furthermore, it outlines UNICEF's role and contribution to global advocacy, policy development and implementation aligned with these frameworks.

As I have already clarified before, the CRC is the most important international legal framework that provides a comprehensive set of rights for all children. The Convention was adopted in 1989 to ensure every child is more than just an object who belongs to his or her parents and for whom decisions are made. Children shouldn't be viewed as "adults in training". This present agreement upholds States Parties to provide all children with the rights they are entitled to. Children must be allowed to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity. Access to a happy childhood and to an environment that makes that possible is essential. In order for children to get the healthcare and nutrition they need to survive and develop, governments decided to change their laws and policies, to make investments by the influence of the CRC (UNICEF, n.d., Q).

Regarding the relevance to migrant and refugee children's rights, Articles 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 20 and 22 ensure the following:

- Protection of discrimination or punishment of any kind on the basis of the status, activities, opinions, and beliefs of the child's guardians. (Article 2)
- Children must be registered immediately after birth, providing them with the right to a name, to acquire a nationality, and to know and be cared for. States must ensure the implementation of these rights with their national laws and their obligations under the relevant international instruments. This is crucial in the prevention of children becoming stateless. (Article 7)
- Preservation of identity, including name, nationality, and family relations. (Article 8)

- Children cannot be separated from their parents against their will, except if such is in the best interests of the child. Separated children have the right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with parents on a regular basis. When separation is initiated by a State Party, parents, or children must be provided with essential information about the separated person's whereabouts. (Article 9)
- Applications of a child or parents for the purpose of reunification must be dealt with in a positive, humane manner. (Article 10)
- Special protection must be provided for children deprived of their family environment. In accordance with national laws, governments shall ensure alternative care for such children. (Article 20)
- A child seeking refugee status must receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance. (Article 22)

While the CRC is a legally binding document for all ratifying states, its impact depends on the integration of national laws and enforcement of these protections (United Nations, n.d., A).

Due to the mass migration the two world wars caused, the international community steadily assembled a set of guidelines, laws and conventions aimed at protecting the basic human rights and treatment of people who were forced to leave their homes behind and seek refuge in the form of the 1951 Convention. It provides the internationally recognised definition of a refugee and outlines the legal protection, rights and assistance refugees are entitled to. According to Article 1 of the Convention, a refugee is a person who,

"owning to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [their] former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

These people are granted specific rights. As defined in Article 32, refugees have the right not to be expelled, except under certain, strictly defined conditions. Additional rights outlined in the Convention include:

- The right not to be punished for irregular entry into the territory of a contracting State and the freedom of movement within the territory.

- The right to non-discrimination.
- Access to work and education.
- Rights related to housing, land and property, including intellectual property.
- Freedom of religion.
- Right to access justice.
- To be issued civil, identity and travel documents.
- Social protection.

Refugees not only are granted these rights but are obligated to abide by the laws and regulations of their country of asylum and respect measures taken for the maintenance of public order (UNHCR, n.d., A).

There are certain people who are denied refugee protection. These people are those who have committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity, or have committed a non-political crime outside their host country, prior to their admission as a refugee, or are guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the UN (UNHCR, n.d., A).

Later, the 1967 Protocol was adopted which sets a huge difference between this document and the 1951 Convention. While the Convention was limited to the protection of European refugees, the Protocol removed these geographical borders and other time-based limitations, expanding the Convention to apply universally (UNHCR, n.d., A).

As for the Global Refugee Compact, it is an international agreement adopted in 2018, which sets out the building blocks for a stronger international response to large waves of migration. The Compact gives a roadmap to better include refugees in national systems, societies, and economies to help them contribute to their new environment and to secure their own futures. It states 4 objectives:

1. Ease the pressure on host countries.
2. Increase refugee self-reliance.
3. Expand access to resettlement and other solutions.
4. Support countries of origin to provide the opportunity for refugees to return in safety and dignity.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration is a landmark agreement, also adopted in 2018, at an intergovernmental conference in Morocco. It recognised that children are central to migration management. Governments agreed to real change and positive impact on the lives of refugee minors (UNICEF, n.d., K).

There are multiple additional regional agreements strengthening the protection of children such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the African Charter.

7.b UNICEF'S role in advocacy and policy formulation

As a leading global advocate for children, UNICEF works to promote the implementation of legal frameworks and inspire governments to align national laws with international obligations. UNICEF collaborates with a wide range of partners to develop child-friendly migration policies ensuring that children forced to flee are treated as children first. Through targeted programs such as the Birth Registration Campaign or U-Report, the agency provides the availability of entitled rights, in these cases, the right to be registered immediately after birth and to have a voice. UNICEF's initiatives promote children the right to be a child, just as the legal frameworks outline. The Organization advocates to end immigration detention of children which is also stated in the CRC. Family reunification policies have been developed with the collaboration of UNICEF, and basic services like access to education, WASH and health care are also provided by the agency.

UNICEF publishes various reports, which develop data and research methods, providing a better understanding of migrant children's situation. These reports also help raise awareness and pressure states to act. The statistics bring the seriousness of the case into a more understandable approach and highlight how many children are affected all over the world. This lets regular people feel the well-being of these children on a more personal level and inspires them to volunteer.

8. UNICEF's framework for protecting migrant children's rights

8.a Core principals and strategies

UNICEF works with certain ideas in mind to provide better living conditions for all children. To do so, the organization collected 5 core values to follow through its initiatives: care, respect, integrity, trust, and accountability. Every program and proposal are held to these values to ensure the best approach to provide children their rights (UNICEF, n.d., L).

Agenda for Action was created to protect include and empower children on the move searching for refuge due to violence, poverty, disasters, natural disasters or in the search for a better future. The Agenda includes 6 actions to meet its aim, according to UNICEF's webpage "Agenda for action for children on the move" (n.d., M), the actions are the following:

1. Addressing the causes of migration and displacement.

UNICEF aims to address the root causes of poverty and violence with efforts such as increasing access to services and social protection with the objective of protecting children.

2. Provide safe climate mobility options.

UNICEF collaborates with governments to reduce displacement risk. Systems and services should be more climate-resilient, portable, and accessible to children as they move. The agency also supports green jobs and skills for the youth which provides a safer option for migration.

3. Protection from harm and keeping families together.

Safer and more regular pathways to migration and policies to prevent family separation help keep children's safety as they seek refuge. All children shall have a legal identity as it is fundamental to keep families together.

4. End immigration detention of children.

Children must be provided a safe environment, either as community-based accommodations with case management services, or in case of unaccompanied and separated children, placing them in foster care, supervised independent living or other family-, or community-based living arrangements.

5. Access to education and social services.

Governments, communities, and the private sector shall collectively provide access to education, health, mental health, social and child protection services enhancing safety and the well-being of minors.

6. End xenophobia and discrimination against migrant children.

The definition of xenophobia is the dislike or prejudice against people from other countries. UNICEF works together with religious groups, non-governmental organisations, the media, and the private sector to fight xenophobia and scapegoating people on the move through mis- and disinformation. Stronger measures are able to eliminate discrimination and marginalisation across policies and services.

These values inspire UNICEF and collaborating partners to approach migration as humanly as possible.

8.b Implementation at the national and local level

UNICEF implements these frameworks into practice with the collaboration of its partners. Working with governments for children to be included in all systems such as education, health, social protection, and child protection system in a way that is still in alignment with national policy. Children must be referred to child protection services, and such national systems must be linked to the migration systems and other systems between governments. UNICEF helps to establish cross-border case management systems as well. Minimum standards and oversight mechanisms include indicators related to the protection of children in migration. National Offices as well as National Human Rights Commissions must focus on overseeing the situation of these children.

Regarding human, financial and infrastructure resources, national governments in partnership with UNICEF, support costing and advocating for the financing of public services. They also promote and finance systemic reforms for professionalisation, accreditation, and training of the social service workforce, which is provided for frontline social service workers as well, in order to help them to be more sensitive with arriving children, as children come from all kinds of cultures and norms. However, all relevant actors receive training for the development of alternatives to detention. Workers in contact with migrant children are equipped to provide appropriate help to meet the needs of the vulnerable in question (UNICEF, 2024).

Children in the context of migration must be included in national surveys, assessments, and censuses, so the data shall be used to inform revisions of legislation, policies, and services in order for migrant children to be provided services that best meet their needs (UNICEF, 2024).

At country level, implementations are managed through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), which coordinates the planning and implementation of UN development activities at national levels. UNSDCF also shows guidance throughout the whole programme cycle including driving to evaluation (UNICEF, 2022, A).

8.c Case studies of successful interventions

Many programs have been initiated by or with the collaboration of UNICEF to ensure children's rights across the world, especially in regions where they are more vulnerable than their peers. Children in different countries face different challenges and UNICEF is working to find specific, effective solutions. This section will include 2 certain programs to showcase these successful interventions.

The first program is the Guardianship program in Greece to addresses the appropriate protection of migrant children. The program translates as a new law on guardianship which was implemented as the National Guardianship System for Unaccompanied Minors. The framework entered into force on 01.01.2024 (UNICEF, 2025), established within the Ministry of Migration and Asylum (UNICEF, 2024, C). The project is co-funded by the EU, under the Greek National Programme of the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund 2021-2027 (UNICEF, 2024, C). According to a UNICEF webpage elaborating on this law (2018, C), there were over 3.400 unaccompanied, or separated migrant or refugee children, with more than 2.100 of them waiting on shelter and accommodation. The program was designed to ensure each of these children will have a designated guardian (UNICEF, 2025), whose responsibilities include taking care of custody and care, legal representation, and assistance regarding property matters. Guardians are working to represent, defend, assist and facilitate unaccompanied children in Greece acting as focal points for the child and collaborating with other stakeholders (UNICEF, 2024).

Guardianship as it is, stands for an institution that aims to protect the rights and best interests of unaccompanied children. It establishes quasi-family relationships replacing parental responsibility. A natural person is authorised as a guardian, called a Guardianship Mandate Person and will be the person responsible for upholding the responsibilities appointed to meet the goal of the program (UNICEF, 2024, C). As of 2024, 1.770 children were supported by 161

guardians in 25 locations in Greece, and over 2.485 children received guardianship services (UNICEF, 2024, C). UNICEF collaborated throughout the implementation of the project, which is built upon the CRC, regarding Article 19 stating children shall be protected from all forms of violence. In national law, checks and balances are foreseen to ensure the project is compliant with the law and standards. UNICEF provides technical support for the quality work of the program, ensuring the accessibility for every child in need (UNICEF, 2024, C).

The second project is initiated in Bangladesh to improve the education system. In this country, out of 58 million children, which is 34% of the total population, only 19% of children aged 3-5 attend early childhood education, and only 64% of them go on to complete secondary education. The reason for the exclusion of children from education varies; girls are forced into child marriages, while boys into child labour. Furthermore, 20 million children are exposed to climate hazards disrupting their education, whether it is a flood, extreme heat, drought or cyclones (UNICEF, n.d., R).

However, children for whom education is accessible, struggle to acquire basic academic skills. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, only 43% of children aged 10 were proficient in reading and 25% of secondary school graduates attained basic competencies (UNICEF, n.d., R).

As a very high percentage of the population are children, education is crucial for the future of the country as well. Children will bring their education into adolescence and must use it in the workforce. With such educational opportunities, children are withdrawn from their potential, that should be an ensured right for them.

To improve the situation, UNICEF works with local governments to robust the education system for it to become more inclusive, relevant, and accessible. The aim is for the rate of completion of secondary education to rise. To ensure the objectives are achieved, UNICEF follows 3 priority areas:

1. Early learning: A stronger capacity of the education system improves accessibility for all children, ensuring they can receive education at an early age as well.
2. Quality: Improvement of national capacity and education system to deliver uninterrupted high-quality primary education which can be accessed by every child.
3. Education and skills for adolescents: Strengthening national capacity and education system to provide appropriate knowledge and skills developed to ensure children will get by well in adulthood.

Delivering resilient education is essential in the face of emergencies and climate change which many are exposed to (UNICEF, n.d., R).

As new challenges arise, and new problems appear to be faced by children, UNICEF works to address innovative and sustainable solutions. These case studies showcase the importance and effectiveness of UNICEF's work.

9. Future goals and strategies

9.a Long-term objectives

UNICEF aims for the well-being of all children, which includes migrant and refugee minors as well. The agency realises the specific needs of these children and has developed plans for the future to ensure children can be children first.

UNICEF's Strategic Plan, 2022-2025, provides a better understanding of the agency's future goals, which are guided by the Core Commitment for Children in Humanitarian Action. The Plan itself provides a global framework for all offices, country programmes and National Committees. To achieve providing the desired aims, a transformational and systemic change is required, which is what UNICEF focuses on. It is critical to address the causes of everything children go through today, such as mortality, poverty, vulnerability, etc. This can be achieved by providing proper education, various healthcare services, including mental health services, addressing climate crises, vaccine equity and reaching those who have been left behind. UNICEF doesn't work alone in this; partnerships and engagements are essential to make the best of the agency's strengths. UNICEF has a broad network of partners in different sectors, who can contribute to driving change at a scale, by providing a local presence in over 190 countries. UNICEF has become an expert, with thought leadership over the years, based on field evidence, research and data. Other stakeholders shall be included to catalyse sustainable change (UNICEF, 2022, B).

Action-based approach must be taken, due to the data provided in the Plan, the number of children living in countries with complex emergencies driven by inequality and fragility, the number has reached 1.2 billion (UNICEF, 2022, B).

UNICEF's plan is well-thought-out and structured including a focus on systemic change, working in partnerships and amplifying resource mobilization to reaching those in need more effectively. To achieve the latter, UNICEF will collaborate with local actors, join up UN system, and leverage the private sector. Children and young people will be involved in the work of the agency since they are now considered to be key resources with special knowledge of their own, and their communities' needs. The youth is now thought of as problem-solvers and agents of change with good ideas and the ability to contribute to innovative solutions and sustainable results. This new approach gives young people a voice, they never had before. It does not only

give them the opportunity to fulfil their potential but gives them a chance to change their presence, having a greater influence on their own future (UNICEF, 2022, B).

The plan also includes a better focus on risk-informed humanitarian and developmental nexus programming, which is achieved by contributing to crisis prevention and being well-prepared to react in time and effectively. Building a strong and resilient system while strengthening social cohesion and accountability helps UNICEF to ensure the rights of those affected are fulfilled (UNICEF, 2022, B).

The digital industry is growing at a fast pace, which UNICEF must keep up with to be able to work with the best possible technology that fits the global aim. Harnessing the digital technology is by improving UNICEF programme implementation, streamlining operations and processes, concurrently enhancing outreach, including remote and digital service delivery in a flexible, community-based approach (UNICEF, 2022, B).

UNICEF focuses on addressing underlying drivers of discrimination and transforms structures and norms to fight racism, by focusing on intersectional approaches. As in previous chapters I have already covered, migrants are not welcomed in most countries due to the attitude of some of the local population (UNICEF, 2022, B).

The Strategic Plan includes a section on “Results set in the Strategic Plan”, stating 5 goal areas of aims that must be achieved in the context of every child:

1. Survival and the ability to thrive with access to appropriate nutrition, quality healthcare and essential supplies.
2. Opportunity to acquire education and skills for the future.
3. Protection from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices.
4. Access to water, sanitation and accommodation in a safe and sustainable environment.
5. Access to inclusive social protection and accommodation free from poverty (UNICEF, 2022, B).

With the support of the Plan, UNICEF is able to provide help and assistance to conquer challenges and difficulties, being a key presence in migrant children’s lives as a sense of safety and opportunity for a proper childhood, regardless of their circumstances and situation.

9.b Emerging challenges and opportunities

The content of this study provides the necessary information to be able to recognise the challenges UNICEF faces while working towards a better future for refugee children. The drivers of migration, as previously mentioned before, are extreme poverty, armed conflicts, hopes of better living conditions, natural disasters, extreme heat and other climate-related problems which roots in climate change.

Border policies, and anti-migrant sentiments are problems migrants must face on their journey. During migration, children are either left behind, unaccompanied or get separated from their families, putting them in greater danger. UNICEF has created programmes which better meet the fulfilment of unaccompanied refugee children's rights and have initiated preventive measures but the children who find themselves in this situation regardless of UNICEF's work, must reach the agency to receive help and security.

Many refugees lack access to clean water and sanitation as well as proper nutrition which are only available at share points provided by UNICEF.

There is a limitation in funding and resources to provide the work of the agency as well as a limitation to access digital services which excludes children from online education or their parents from gathering information needed to complete their journey or just to keep in touch with their loved ones.

As the climate worsens, more people will leave their homes causing mass migration, putting more and more children in danger and putting pressure not only on governments' systems but UNICEF's capacity as well, making it harder to reach every child in need.

Lack of legal identity is already a problem among migrants, making them invisible in state services, making reaching for help even harder as they have no access at all to provide assistance they are entitled to.

Despite the rising challenges, many opportunities are present as well, such as forming new legal frameworks and regional packs with the collaboration of partners across sectors and providing innovative approaches to support refugee children. UNICEF focuses on gathering child-focused data to determine the exact needs of these children more precisely.

Furthermore, the already implemented programs provide a comprehensive experience-based knowledge base to establish more effective and sustainable solutions in the future, by identifying the gaps shown over time.

The use of digital tools opens a wider range of service delivery opportunities to reach and empower refugee minors regardless of their location.

Moreover, the participation of the youth can bring new approaches to innovation and program design, as the affected generations themselves are placed to share their needs and perspectives.

Finally, cross-border cooperation is a great way to create better protection between countries. Linking countries and governments with UNICEF can create frameworks that go beyond borders ensuring that migrant children's best interests are considered to be a respected, and well-realised priority.

9.c Proposed innovations and focus areas

In this section, I will reflect on the programs I have discussed in previous chapters identifying the core focus areas. Recent years' implemented initiatives were programs like the U-Report, Blue Dots, School-in-a-Box and birth registration. Each program focuses on a serious problem and provides not only effective but innovative solutions as well. The School-in-a-Box and its alternative version include refugee children in education again after they fell out, ensuring they receive the proper support to learn skills and can attain knowledge which will benefit them as adults.

Similarly, the Blue Dot hubs are designed to provide an environment for children to be safe and have a free space to play, grow and be with their families without having to worry about anything, even if that calm mindset lasts for a few hours or days. These places offer the necessary services for well-being and to use of digital gadgets.

In addition, the Birth Registration Programme lets refugee children be a part of society in a legal sense, with the same opportunities and availabilities any other children would have. This not only provides a better knowledge of each child for their local governments but helps parents to make sure their children receive what they are entitled to.

Lastly, the U-Report gives minors and others as well, the chance to make their voice count and to be heard. The program was designed for information sharing and to provide access to digital tools. But the use of it also gives users the hope they need and the opportunity to share their opinions. Knowing they have the ability to ask for help can calm them since it provides a sense of safety to know help is on the way and they are not on their own.

As for focus areas, examining the nature of these programmes, the areas identified are the following:

- Access to education
- Providing legal identity
- Access to healthcare and social protection
- Opportunity to have a voice and to be included
- Safety and alternatives from detention

Something important to consider when discussing the initiatives of UNICEF is that these programs are in motion and were not created as a one-time solution. The aim is to create a problem-solving method that is sustainable and effective at the same time.

10. The change of migrant policy worldwide due to UNICEF

10.a Policy changes

Examining the changes of migrant policies by the influence of UNICEF, the nature of the agency must be cleared since the organization is not a legislative body, therefor UNICEF itself cannot create any laws. However, UNICEF can influence governments through advocacy, partnerships, and providing research and evidence with its published reports, studies, and campaigns.

UNICEF's goal is to ensure child rights are integrated into national migrant policies. To achieve this, the agency collaborates with national states, civil societies and international organisations.

There are several great examples that show how UNICEF actually supports decision-making with different partners, which some will be discussed in the next section, but to have a brief overview, categorising the impact of policy changes into two groups: influence on a national and international level.

On an international level mentioning the Global Compact for Migration (United Nations, n.d., B), and the Global Refugee Compact (UNHCR, n.d., B) is essential since UNICEF actively participated in negotiations creating the Compacts, providing the special knowledge the agency upholds. UNICEF's further obligation is to help governments integrate the commitments made in the Compacts into their own policies and legal systems.

As for a national level, the Blueprint is a great example, but the best to showcase how policy influence happens in practice is the law enforced in Greece as in the Guardianship Programme. UNICEF has collaborated with the local authorities and government to find the best way to address the issue of unaccompanied refugee children in the country. The case studies below give a clear understanding of the process of how these changes happened.

The reason why UNICEF has a certain influence on governments' decisions and on international frameworks is that the agency itself is considered to be an authority on child rights. UNICEF is politically neutral, with no legal power, with no ability to obligate other actors, inviting partners to trust the work and opinion of UNICEF.

To answer one of my research questions; „How does UNICEF contribute to shaping national and international migrant policies?“, the migrant policy has become more flexible and more open to realising the rights of minors on the move. The Global Compacts and national laws

implemented by the collaboration of UNICEF strengthen this statement. However, regardless of the progress made to improve the political challenges hindering the protection of the rights of refugee children, the migrant policy in some countries still needs to be worked on to better meet these rights and provide the best interest of migrant children.

10.b Case studies from different regions

The first case showcasing the influence of UNICEF on migrant policy is the law implemented under the Guardianship Programme in Greece (UNICEF, 2018, C). For a better understanding in the case of both case studies in this chapter, I describe the specific problem that later was solved with the collaboration of UNICEF, then I explain what UNICEF's part was in finding a solution. After, the policy/systemic change will be cleared following by a brief explanation of the outcome.

In the case of Greece, the main problem is rooted in the number of unaccompanied, separated children seeking refuge across the country. As previously numerous mentioned, these children are at greater risk of facing dangerous situations on their own. The number of such minors kept increasing creating a serious problem both in migration and child protection. Action was needed on the part of the government to protect children and to meet its obligation stated in the CRC.

The Greek authority designed a law, a specific system with the contribution of UNICEF to create a way for these children to be in safety and receive the support and assistance they need. To achieve this goal, UNICEF provided guidance to realize the specific infringed rights, to acknowledge the needs of unaccompanied and separated children in the country. The agency gave technical support focusing on monitoring and evaluating of the operation of the National System. Concurrently, UNICEF made sure all affected children were included and had access to guardianship services (UNICEF, 2025). After careful work, the law was created and then adopted making guardianship services official and available for all children in need.

As a result of this collaboration, according to a report published in 2024 by UNICEF, 1,770 children are being supported by 161 guardians in 25 locations all across Greece and over 2,485 children were reached in addition through the provided services (UNICEF, 2024, C).

The Blueprint for Joint Action shows a more global example of the influence on migrant policy. UNICEF partnered with UNHCR to design the project which is aimed to solve general problems regarding migrant children (UNICEF, 2022).

The problems UNICEF identified include immigration detention, lack of access to services, education and legal aid, and separated families. These occur globally, affecting most refugee populations (UNICEF, 2022).

As a response, UNICEF and UNHCR designed a framework, which can be served as a guide for governments to address these problems and can integrate it into their own national systems. The project is a commitment states can apply in order to ensure that the right of refugees is met (UNICEF, 2022).

For the countries that voluntarily committed to the goals of the Blueprint, the two agencies provide support in integrating the standards into their national laws, policies and practices ensuring the project can achieve what it was designed for.

Blueprint has helped adjust national systems to better fit the interests of migrant children and replace detention with alternatives contributing to significant improvements in national systems and the lives of refugee children as well.

As conclusion of these case studies, UNICEF plays a crucial role in recommending methods and alternatives to develop proper migrant policies as the agency has no legally obligatory role. Through advocacy, partnership and technical support, UNICEF has influenced numerous policies to improve the quality of care and protection for migrant and refugee children. These efforts showcase how global collaboration can lead to positive changes in the lives of displaced children.

11. Recent activity of UNICEF

11.a Major projects and programs

UNICEF has been active, achieving great success and gaining experience for many years. The agency is present in many regions collaborating with governments and local actors. As for the nature of the organisation, emergency response is a key activity, resulting in a constant presence at high-risk locations, providing the most that is possible.

According to the UNICEF webpage on Current issues (n.d., N), the agency is providing its services for children affected by the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, is working towards ending discrimination and violence against LMBTQ people concurrently developing prevention responses to sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment. Children are receiving intercountry adoption and protection not only of their rights but from the harmful impacts of child pornography. Furthermore, malnutrition is a serious problem among children, therefore UNICEF is working towards finding solutions.

As for the most recently published Strategic Plan, which contains the strategies for the years 2026-2029, UNICEF has outlined a wide range of goals. The areas in focus are protecting children from any kind of dangers and providing education and opportunities to attend schools so that more children are able to achieve the minimum learning proficiency level and acquire skills for work and life (UNICEF, 2025).

In addition, nutrition, and safely managed drinking water, along with proper sanitation and hygiene are accessible for children and their families, as well as young women can benefit from iron-containing nutrient supplements which can help in the prevention of pregnancy malnutrition and low birth weight. Pregnant women and children receive lifesaving interventions and the necessary health services are provided in general for those in need. In the case of children with the HIV virus, antiretroviral therapy is accessible. Screening and treatment interventions' accessibility is essential to detect and treat diseases early, which is a goal of the organisation to increase the number of children having access to these services, as well as to register newborns right after birth (UNICEF, 2025).

Furthermore, poverty is still a great problem, therefore UNICEF focuses on the necessary measures to ensure children in extreme poverty have their rights fulfilled (UNICEF, 2025).

Moreover, the agency provides various services, such as parenting support and programs, specialized social welfare, online protection and justice services. UNICEF secures livelihoods through employment and entrepreneurship which further ensures refugees can fit in (UNICEF, 2025).

Lastly, working towards ending child marriage and gender-based violence, as well as female genital mutilation and preventing disasters related to climate and environment are priorities of the organisation too (UNICEF, 2025).

These areas cover numerous SDGs. UNICEF has committed to contributing to 12 out of the 17 so far and will continue to work with the vision these provide to ensure sustainable interventions and initiatives (UNICEF, 2025).

UNICEF continuously advocates for children and expands its partnerships to reach every child. According to the Plan, the agency keeps advocating for the rights of children and expanding its connections with partnerships, providing policy and programme advice. Engaging with families and young people is essential to learn the exact needs of those in need, which is why UNICEF strengthens communication and the basic social service delivery systems. UNICEF works on developing the most effective ways to mobilize and optimize resources, build an agile and skilled workforce, and provide an empowering, value-driven workplace culture, as well as on action efficiency and assure governance, risk management and oversight (UNICEF, 2025).

With these methods and measures, UNICEF aims for further success in the lives of children and their families, fulfilling their rights and best interests, taking up on its role as a key actor in providing better living conditions for children.

12. Conclusion

12.a Summary of findings

Considering the research questions of this Thesis, having examined the wide range of activities and instruments of UNICEF, I must include that, the protection of migrant and refugee children's rights is an extremely complicated process with many obstacles to overcome since not only there are numerous barriers and causes that need to be solved at the root of the problem, but national systems' implementations of rights and policies vary creating a much more complex situation UNICEF aims to tackle.

UNICEF plays a crucial, active role in the lives of millions of children, as a politically neutral, trusted authority collaborating with national actors such as governments and civil societies, and with other international institutions. The agency advocates global child rights based on several international conventions and frameworks such as the CRC, 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, and the Global Compacts on Migration and Refugees. As the organisation has no legal authority to create laws and obligations, it contributes to their development, providing guidance towards sustainable solutions. UNICEF has great experience and wide connections thanks to its partners, ensuring the trustworthiness of the agency when it comes to the design of new regulations.

UNICEF supports states to find ways to effectively integrate these legal documents into their national policies and influences them to ensure every child's rights are fulfilled. Being present in over 190 territories, UNICEF has managed to make changes and initiate innovative approaches to the programs and tools it launches to help those in need.

These programs include the Blue Dot hubs, creating a safe space not only for children to play and develop but for mothers as well to nurse in private. Refugees are able to access necessary services and receive accurate information on whatever they need. Furthermore, School-in-a-Box was designed to improve the educational disadvantages refugee children are exposed to by providing the basic, yet necessary school supplies, while the WASH initiative makes safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene accessible. Moreover, the Birth Registration Campaign helps children be legally visible to states and the U-Report, the online platform that gives the opportunity to contact the agency and lets users make their voices, and opinions heard. It helps the agency to respond faster and realise the exact needs of people.

However, as mentioned before, there are obstacles to overcome, such as discrimination, funding and capacity limitations, families are forced to be separated leaving children on the move unaccompanied, making them even more vulnerable to danger. The flaws in the way the world works show through the challenges UNICEF must face. Let it be poverty, armed conflict, barriers in national policies, or climate change-related disasters. Millions are forced to flee their homes, exposing them to traumatic experiences. Human rights are being violated every day without the knowledge of societies from developed countries. Children are fighting for survival all over the world.

Regardless of the technical and systemic flaws, UNICEF still manages to keep making changes with successful outcomes. All programs by or with the contribution of UNICEF have helped the world provide a safer, healthier, and more accessible environment for refugee children. There has been a great increase in birth registration, children can access proper education no matter where they are, and healthcare and mental health services are provided. UNICEF has managed to improve cross-border cooperation and influence states to realise children are children first, then refugees.

12.b Implications for future research and policy

My research reveals the gaps in the work of UNICEF showcasing that further research and improvement are necessary. There is a minimal number of academic works on program effectiveness and local implementation challenges. There is very minimal data available on migrant minors related cases which makes it harder to address the exact numbers and problems.

For future research, the effectiveness of certain programs and initiatives is needed, as well as a comparative analysis of national frameworks influenced by UNICEF. There is also a lack of knowledge of the impact of policy change, therefore quantitative research could be a possibility in the future for researchers.

Policies must be more flexible to be able to provide the best services for every child. Migration policies are extremely strict and aren't necessarily child-sensitive which is a huge issue in child-protective settings. A solution would be to adopt a more inclusive and intersectional national policy in each country to ensure the rights children are entitled to, but there are many more options to create a better system to help the work of UNICEF.

The agency should strengthen data collection systems and promote digital inclusion as well as expand its network for wider influence. Including youth, the next generation to be responsible for the problems of the world we live in, is an incredibly wise decision by UNICEF as they are full of innovative thoughts and are the key to finding solutions.

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14. Appendices

14.a Supplementary materials

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