



# PROTECTION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

IN THE MIDDLE EAST  
AND NORTH AFRICA



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency  
مفوضية الأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين



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# FOREWORD

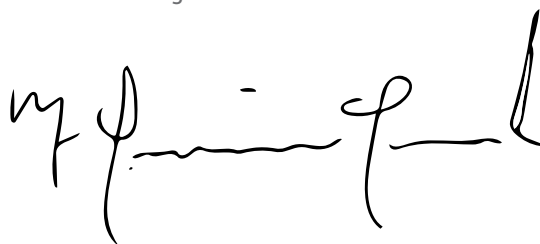
For decades, conflicts have resulted in successive waves of widespread displacement in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Governments and populations in the region have generally kept their borders and homes open, demonstrating remarkable generosity to their neighbours seeking aman (safety) from violence and persecution, in line with long-standing traditions of hospitality and asylum.

The greatest threats posed by conflict and its ensuing displacement are faced by those most in need of protection: children. Children who are forced to flee leave behind their homes, communities, schools, friends, aspirations, sense of security and, often, their childhoods.

Countless exchanges with refugee children have revealed the daily struggles they face in trying to establish a sense of normalcy in their lives, despite the physical, psychological, and emotional wounds most have suffered. Their resilience and strength are an inspiration to those responding to their needs.

This report highlights, against a background of relevant international guiding principles, a range of good practices undertaken by States, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other partners across the region, together with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to respond to the protection needs of refugee children, guided by the best interests of the child. It is intended to provide examples of successful interventions that can bring about tangible progress in protecting refugee children. Despite the variations in contexts and needs of refugee children throughout the region, many of the examples can be replicated and scaled up to achieve a greater, longer-term impact on the lives and protection of refugee children.

The collective action of States, together with international and national actors, on behalf of refugee children serves as an investment in the future of the region.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amin Awad', with a stylized, flowing script.

**Amin Awad**

*DIRECTOR,*

**UNHCR Bureau for the Middle East & North Africa**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the number of refugees has doubled in the last four years. Over half of these refugees are children. Refugee children in the region suffer immensely as a result of conflict and displacement – children have often been wounded or killed and suffered the consequences of conflict, destruction and violence. When fleeing into neighbouring countries, refugee children may find safety but also uncertainty and daily struggles that are distressing both for the children and for their families. Separation from family members, difficulty accessing basic services, and increased poverty make it more likely that children will marry early, work before the legal age or in dangerous and exploitative conditions, drop out of school or face violence in their homes, communities or schools. They also face risks of detention, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation during their displacement.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and partners are prioritizing efforts to protect refugee children in the region by adopting a systems approach to address the specific needs and risks faced by refugee children, in line with the UNHCR Global Framework for the Protection of Children. This report outlines a range of good practices undertaken by UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA and other United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and other partners across MENA, together with States, that demonstrate the progress made in protecting refugee children in the region.

## INVESTING IN NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS

UNHCR aims to increase the non-discriminatory access of refugee children to national child protection systems, to expand the capacity of these services to respond to the increased number of children in the territories of host countries, and to improve the quality of these services in line with international standards. Key actions include offering technical and financial support, training government and national civil society child protection actors, and advocating for policy development or reform. In the first half of 2014, UNHCR provided specialized training on child protection to more than 3,692 government, UNHCR and partner staff.

## STRENGTHENING ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIP

UNHCR works in partnership with governments, civil society, UN and other actors to advocate for resources and policy and legal reform needed to better protect refugee children. Key advocacy initiatives, such as “The Big Heart Campaign for Syrian Refugee Children”, launched by Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohamed Al Qasimi, and the “No Lost Generation” initiative, have garnered increased commitments to, and funding for, child protection and education in the region.

## SUPPORTING CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES TO BETTER PROTECT REFUGEE CHILDREN

UNHCR works to strengthen the capacity of children and adults to help children overcome the effects of conflict and displacement, and protect them from further violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Throughout the region, UNHCR and partners have engaged more than 85,000 women, men, girls and boys in discussions on how they and others in their communities could better protect children.

## BRINGING QUALITY EDUCATION TO EVERY REFUGEE CHILD

UNHCR aims to increase the participation of refugee children in formal education and to ensure that schools offer them safe and supportive environments. The percentage of Syrian refugee children who are out of school in MENA host countries was successfully reduced from 70 per cent in August 2013 to 49 per cent in July 2014, with the most progress noted in Jordan and Egypt.

## GIVING EVERY REFUGEE CHILD A LEGAL IDENTITY: BIRTH REGISTRATION

In keeping with its global strategy on civil registration, UNHCR works with State authorities throughout MENA to reduce procedural barriers to birth registration, advocates for policies recognizing the right of all children to be registered at birth irrespective of their status, and undertakes campaigns to raise awareness among refugees on how to register new births. In Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, UNHCR and partners have distributed 250,000 leaflets explaining birth registration procedures.

## PROVIDING REFUGEE CHILDREN WITH SPECIALIZED CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

Specialized services are provided urgently to children who are unaccompanied or separated, or who experience violence in their homes or schools, child labour, trafficking, or sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including early marriage, or who have disabilities. In the first half of 2014, over 11,000 children received specialized child protection services while, in Lebanon and Jordan, over 28,000 children who were at risk of, or survivors of, gender-based violence benefited from prevention or response services from UNHCR and partners.

*UNHCR uses a combination of the above strategies to address specific child protection risks, as outlined below:*

## PROMOTING FAMILY UNITY AND PROTECTING UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

UNHCR works with partners to identify unaccompanied and separated children in a timely manner, assess the extent of family separation and the situation of affected children, conduct a best interest assessment for each child and promote the reunification with family members through family tracing and verification. UNHCR focuses on preserving family unity at all stages of displacement, which includes avoiding the separation of children from their families at the border, as well as preventing secondary separation after arrival in the country of asylum. Where family reunification is not possible, UNHCR seeks appropriate, family-based alternative care arrangements, in line with the child's best interests. For instance, more than 89 per cent of unaccompanied children were reunited with their family members in Jordan in 2014.

## PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO EARLY MARRIAGE

UNHCR focuses on preventing early marriage and mitigating the risks faced by children who are already married. Prevention is undertaken through a wide range of actions including: assisting socio-economically vulnerable families; supporting women, girls, boys and men to advocate for change to social norms that condone early marriage and to raise awareness of the risks of early marriage; promoting girls' participation in education; and strengthening legal and policy frameworks to discourage early marriage. For instance, in Algeria, UNHCR uses school attendance records to identify girls and boys who are at risk of early marriage or who are already married and, subsequently, provides multi-sectoral assistance to them. Multi-sectoral assistance includes legal aid, psychosocial support, protection monitoring, and specialized child protection services.

## PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM CHILD LABOUR

UNHCR seeks to address the underlying factors of child labour, such as poverty, social attitudes condoning the practice, and demand from economic sectors where child labour is prevalent. To help mitigate poverty, UNHCR and partners offer vocational training, literacy and life-skills opportunities, as well as cash assistance, food vouchers, and core relief items to refugee families who are socio-economically vulnerable. UNHCR also works with governments to strengthen existing legal and policy frameworks for the protection of children from child labour, with a particular emphasis on the worst forms of child labour, and to ensure that children involved in child labour benefit from multi-sectoral services. More than one million Syrian refugees have received in-kind assistance, cash or vouchers, helping to reduce their economic vulnerability.

## PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

In certain sub-regions of MENA, a high number of refugee children may travel alongside adults in mixed migratory movements. These factors expose them to risks of being sold, enslaved, trafficked, or sexually or economically exploited. To mitigate these risks, in Yemen and North Africa, UNHCR and partners advocate for child-sensitive reception facilities and alternatives to detention.

Protecting Children at Risk of Detention. UNHCR supports States to develop and strengthen child-sensitive asylum laws and migration policies and works with partners to promote alternatives to detention.

# INTRODUCTION

Half of the world's refugees are children. Many refugee children spend their entire childhoods in displacement, uncertain about the future. Children – whether refugees, internally displaced or stateless – are at greater risk than adults of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. They may experience and witness disturbing events, or separate from their families. At the same time, family and other social support networks may be weakened and education may be disrupted. These experiences can have a profound

## THE NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN MENA DOUBLED OVER 4 YEARS

effect on children – from infancy and childhood through adolescence. During emergencies and in displacement, girls and boys may face particular gender-related protection risks.

The total number of refugees in MENA has doubled in four years, largely due to the Syria crisis. Since 2011, more than 3 million Syrian refugees have fled their country and sought refuge in the region. Every 30 minutes, 35 children become refugees in MENA. Over 1,530,000 Syrian refugees



are children, leaving national child protection systems overburdened in refugee-receiving countries in the region – countries that have already experienced several waves of refugee influxes and situations of protracted displacement.

Although refugee children find safety from conflict and persecution when they arrive in host countries, they often

need support to overcome the distressing experiences they have faced in their countries of origin—including widespread violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, and family separation. Further, in displacement, they continue

**EVERY  
HALF AN HOUR**

35 CHILDREN BECOME  
REFUGEES IN THE  
MIDDLE EAST & NORTH  
AFRICA REGION

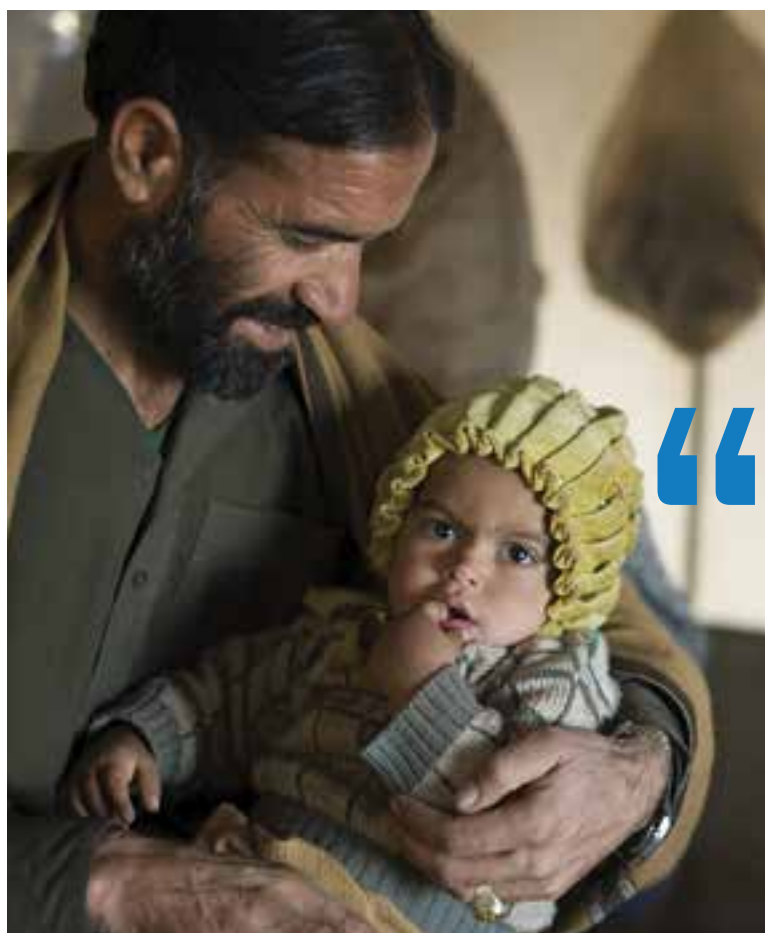
to face child protection risks, including child labour, violence in their homes and schools, early marriage, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), recruitment into armed groups, limited access to birth registration, and separation from parents and families. In the broader

MENA region, mixed migration and onward movements are exposing children to increased risks of detention, trafficking, and other abuses. Given the additional vulnerabilities and needs of refugee children, UNHCR and partners are prioritizing their protection in the region by investing in national child protection systems, by supporting families to better protect children during displacement, and by providing specialized protection services for refugee children.

**50,000**

NUMBER OF NEWLY  
ARRIVED REFUGEE  
CHILDREN REGISTERED  
EVERY MONTH IN 2004





**“The world must act to save a generation of refugee children... Humanitarian organizations and governments are desperately trying to address the needs of these vulnerable children – but much more needs to be done if we are to avert a tragedy.”**

**ANTÓNIO GUTERRES,**

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

## UPHOLDING THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

States in MENA have demonstrated a strong commitment to protect the human rights of children by universally ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which serves as the foundation for recognizing and protecting child rights in international law and encompasses all children, including refugee children. The MENA region also features near universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, as well as the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

Most States in MENA have also acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which complements provisions in the CRC, and also recognizes the right of all children to be registered at birth, to acquire a nationality, and to enjoy child-specific protections in all situations. MENA is also host to regional human rights instruments addressing the protection of children, including the Covenant on the Rights of the Child in Islam, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Arab Charter on Human Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

*All actions taken concerning refugee children should be guided by the principle that*

**“the human rights of the child, in particular his or her best interests, are to be given primary consideration.”**

## UNHCR FRAMEWORK FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Several States in the region have also ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

In October 2007, States that are members of the UNHCR Executive Committee affirmed that “children, because of their age, social status and physical and mental development are often more vulnerable than adults in situations of forced displacement” and called on States, UNHCR, and other relevant agencies to work jointly in identifying, preventing, and responding to rights violations among children at risk.

Protecting children is central to UNHCR’s mandate. With children representing half of the world’s refugee population and, simultaneously, confronting unique protection risks, responding to their specific needs and supporting their families and communities are key priorities. This includes advocating for their protection from all forms of discrimination, preventing and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, ensuring immediate access to appropriate services, and identifying durable solutions.

In 2012, UNHCR launched the Framework for the Protection of Children, marking an institutional shift from targeting specific categories of children at risk towards a systems approach to protecting all children of concern. It emphasizes supporting families, engaging with communities, strengthening national child protection systems, and advocating for the latter to be accessible

to refugee children. The Framework articulates six core goals that encapsulate UNHCR’s commitment to protect and realize the rights of children. These include promoting the safety of girls and boys in school and at home; increasing their access to child friendly procedures; and supporting their right and capacity to participate in all decisions affecting their well-being. The remaining goals emphasize the issuance of legal documentation to children as a source of protection; ensuring that girls and boys with specific needs receive targeted support; and the identification of appropriate durable solutions.



**“Protecting and meeting the needs of refugee children is one of the most important investments we can make in the future and stability of the region.”**

**AMIN AWAD**

Director, UNHCR Bureau  
for the Middle East and  
North Africa

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF UNHCR'S CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAMMES

UNHCR works in active partnership with governments, civil society, refugee communities and children to promote a comprehensive approach to safeguarding the rights, protection and well-being of children. In relation to the Syrian refugee crisis, over 150 international

organizations, UN agencies, and civil society partners are working in collaboration to strengthen the protection of refugee children. This approach emphasizes the following principles as a means of achieving the six core goals above.

- *Ensure the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all decisions and actions undertaken for children.*
- *Support States in their responsibility to protect children by working with them to strengthen the capacity of national child protection institutions and systems.*
- *Engage with communities and families in better protecting children from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.*
- *Advocate for a non-discriminatory approach to protection that addresses the needs of all refugee children.*
- *Promote the participation of children in their own protection and identification of durable solutions.*
- *Prioritize, together with States and other actors, the protection and immediate support of children.*
- *Work in partnership with key partners and UN agencies to develop a comprehensive, inter-agency child protection strategy that maximizes the reach and effectiveness of all partners' contributions.*
- *Emphasize prevention-related activities, along with enhanced identification and response mechanisms.*
- *Take into account the specific risks children face, depending on factors such as age, gender, and specific needs including disabilities.*

# INVESTING IN NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEMS

In support of States' responsibilities to protect children under their jurisdiction, UNHCR invests in strengthening national child protection systems and services. UNHCR works with government and other actors to increase the non-discriminatory access of refugee children to national child protection systems, to expand the capacity of these services to respond to the increased number of children in their territories, and to improve the quality of these services in line with international standards. In the first half of 2014, UNHCR provided specialized training on child protection issues to more than 3,692 government, partner and UNHCR staff.

In Libya, UNHCR organizes regular consultations with the Libyan National Committee for the Child and UNICEF to ensure national child protection systems take into account the needs of refugee children. The National

Report on the Situation of the Libyan Child, prepared by the National Committee, has a dedicated section on refugee children. Free access of refugee children to national education programmes, healthcare and birth registration are areas of successful advocacy. UNHCR also supports the capacity of local partners to provide psychosocial support to refugee children.

The domestic laws of Iraq, including the 1971 Political Refugee Act, have played an important role in protecting refugees. To strengthen this legal framework, UNHCR is offering technical advice and support to Iraq's Shoura Council to develop a new domestic refugee law that would also strengthen the protection of refugee children. Iraq's Kurdistan region hosts close to 210,000 Syrian refugees and approximately 25,000 refugees of other nationalities. The Kurdistan region offers a favorable protection

environment for refugees, with a broad range of social policies enacted to strengthen protection for children. UNHCR continues to work closely with key government counterparts, such as the Directorate on Violence Against Women, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, to further develop these policies to ensure non-discriminatory access to education, health and legal services for refugee children and families.

Similarly, in Lebanon, UNHCR has worked with the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Social Development to facilitate family-based care for refugee children who are separated from their parents or in need of alternative care arrangements due to abuse or neglect. In 2013, UNHCR and UNICEF strengthened collaboration with Lebanon's Ministry of Social Affairs to further operationalize the national child protection system in responding to the



Strengthening and supporting national child protection systems is the primary focus of the refugee child protection response in Jordan, where collaboration between Jordanian authorities, UNICEF and other partners has resulted in a number of successful initiatives. These include the establishment of a Juvenile Police Department in the main refugee camp at Zaatari to ensure that incidents involving children in conflict with the law are handled appropriately through child-sensitive systems. In addition to the Juvenile Police Department, a Shari'a Court and Civil Status Department Office have also been established in the camp, allowing the lawful registration of both marriages and births. UNHCR, Save the Children International, UNICEF and the Government of Jordan have also jointly developed procedures to formalize alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated refugee children in the country.

Syrian refugee emergency. This includes the development and sharing of Practical Guidance on Child Protection to help standardize the response to individual child protection incidents.

In 2013, Turkey enacted domestic asylum legislation to regulate issues of asylum and refugee protection and also adopted national legislation on child protection, which encompasses refugee children and adheres to international standards. In view of the comprehensive legal framework in place, UNHCR is supporting key government entities to respond to child protection issues, while promoting full implementation of the national legislation.

In Algeria, the Bureau pour les Réfugiés et les Apatrides oversees Refugee Status Determination and the issuance of documentation to refugee children. Challenges remain, however, in relation to children in situations of mixed

migration. UNHCR, therefore, advises and supports the government on the establishment of child-sensitive asylum procedures. In Mauritania, UNHCR and UNICEF support the *Ministre des Affaires Sociales, de l'Enfance et de la Famille* through refugee child protection coordination meetings and training on child protection issues and principles. Similarly, in Tunisia, UNHCR provides technical support to national child protection institutions, such as the *Délégué à la Protection de l'Enfance*, to help the agency perform Best Interest Determinations for unaccompanied children in line with international standards.

In Kuwait, UNHCR offers the authorities technical support to help strengthen national child protection systems by developing specialized expertise on child protection issues, raising the quality of services for children at risk, and improving access to educational opportunities for refugee children.

Egypt's 2008 Child Law established a mechanism for a multi-sectoral approach to child protection issues. UNHCR participates in the Egyptian Child Protection Network (ECPN), which is comprised of UN agencies

and NGOs. The ECPN is dedicated to working with the government to improve child protection systems and policies by establishing a harmonized approach to child protection, resource- and information-sharing, advocacy, and joint member activities. UNHCR also supports the Government of Egypt in providing refugee children with public health care, education and higher education services, in recognition of the strain on these public sectors.

In Yemen, UNHCR works closely with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, which participates actively in the inter-agency Best Interest Determination (BID) panel. In support of this cooperation, UNHCR offers the Ministry training on BID procedures and principles as well as on other key child protection principles. UNHCR also supported the establishment of a Protection Unit in the Police Department in Basateen-Aden to improve the legal response to child abuse. Similarly, UNHCR provided interpretation support for the General Security Office in Aden, which has enabled children and their caregivers to report violence against children in a safe and confidential environment, while their cases proceed within the justice system.

## STRENGTHENING ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIP

UNHCR works in collaboration with governments, donors, UNICEF, UNFPA and other UN agencies, civil society and the private sector to advocate for the resources needed by national child protection systems to provide services in line with international standards and also meet the needs of refugee children. Advocacy efforts also focus on promoting children's participation in decisions that affect them, including at school, in their families, and in their communities.

UNHCR has been actively enhancing partnerships in MENA over the past few years. In light of the changing landscape in the region, UNHCR has sought to build capacity, strengthen partnerships, and boost advocacy and awareness-raising efforts. The engagement of a wide range of actors from civil society, the private sector, foundations, semi-governmental organizations, and other influential bodies is expected to help preserve and expand the protection space for refugee children and their families in the region now and in the longer term.

One notable example has been the launch of "The Big Heart Campaign for Syrian Refugee Children" (TBH) on 20

June 2013, organized by Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher Bint Mohamed Al Qasimi to improve access to education for Syrian refugee children. As UNHCR's first Eminent Advocate, Sheikha Jawaher is also co-hosting the first regional child protection conference in MENA, which will be held in October 2014.

To strengthen engagement with the private sector, a high-level roundtable was convened in the United Arab Emirates in early 2014 to develop the "Private Sector Partnership Platform", which aims to facilitate private sector access to UNHCR. The roundtable engaged interested private sector partners, including both individuals and corporations, on the issue of unaddressed needs, including those of refugee children. Closer collaboration and regular communication with research institutes, think tanks, academics and others has also fostered a deeper understanding of the changes taking place in the region and their impact on refugee children.

The "No Lost Generation" initiative has successfully advocated for increased awareness and resources for the protection and education of children affected by the

## SHARJAH CONFERENCE ON REFUGEE CHILDREN



### Investing in The Future: Protecting Refugee Children is the first Regional Conference on Refugee Child Protection in MENA

Syrian refugee situation. UNHCR also prepares thematic reports on emerging issues related to the protection of refugee children, such as the 2013 publication, *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*, which highlighted the increasing risks of child labour and the lack of access to birth certificates and education. Similarly, UNHCR's 2014 report entitled, *Woman Alone: The fight for survival by Syria's refugee women*, examined the high rates of family separation due to conflict and displacement, leaving vast numbers of women alone in providing for their children and households.

At the national level, UNHCR has successfully advocated with the Ministry of Education in Libya for refugee children to have free access to public education. Similarly, in Algeria, UNHCR's advocacy for the education of refugee children has resulted in access to public schools for all refugee children registered with UNHCR as of 2012, and after 2013 the same right was extended to children seeking asylum.

In Lebanon and Jordan, UNHCR's and partners' advocacy efforts on addressing the challenges related to the civil registration of refugee births have been particularly effective – with Lebanon simplifying registration requirements and Jordan waiving certain deadlines and fines. Similar advocacy efforts are underway in Turkey, where UNHCR advocates both with refugee communities and relevant government counterparts to emphasize the importance of timely and comprehensive birth registration. UNHCR also advocates for all children born in Algeria, regardless of status, to be registered immediately after birth by the civil authorities.

In Iraq, UNHCR's advocacy for access to legal documentation for refugee girls and boys led to a more coherent procedure, whereby all Syrian refugee children above 12 years old enjoy access to residency documents. UNHCR's advocacy on child protection issues is also

closely integrated with other protection activities. These include the launching of a comprehensive protection-monitoring framework, revising procedures on UNHCR registration and documentation, and conducting Best Interests Determinations (BID), while streamlining referral pathways to services.

In Kuwait, UNHCR continues to engage in activities to raise public awareness on the rights of children of concern to UNHCR, including children who may be at risk of statelessness due to gaps in the nationality law. The improvement of the latter remains a primary focus in the advocacy and technical support that UNHCR provides to the Government. The Office also advocates for the unconditional access to education and health care for refugee and stateless children residing in Kuwait, along with access to lawful employment upon reaching the age of majority. The Office also continues to intervene on behalf of refugee children who face difficulties in obtaining birth certificates due to a lack of valid residency status.

In Egypt, the Egyptian Child Protection Network is advocating for child-sensitive procedures in the juvenile justice system and for improved facilities for children, in need of alternative care, who cannot be placed in family-based care arrangements. Key areas for advocacy in 2015 include the integration of child-friendly spaces into government structures, as well as a more significant role of Child Protection Committees in the protection of refugee children.

# SUPPORTING CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES AS SOURCES OF PROTECTION

Recognizing the central role of families and communities in the care and protection of refugee children, UNHCR and partners work to strengthen the capacity and resilience of children and adults to help children overcome the effects of conflict and displacement, and protect them from further violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

In instances where community practices are among the factors increasing child protection risks, UNHCR engages with refugee communities to promote positive change to prevent violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation

**“When we left Syria, we left as 15 year olds. We crossed the border as 50 year olds.”**  
**REFUGEE GIRL, 15**  
 JORDAN

and increase the likelihood that children in need of services can access appropriate support. UNHCR also promotes the principle that children's views are given due consideration in all matters affecting their well-being and with respect to their age and level of development. In the first half of 2014, UNHCR and partners engaged with 85,000 refugee children and adults in MENA to raise awareness on child-related protection risks.

In Iraq, UNHCR works with partners to promote a community-based approach to child protection focusing, inter alia, on early marriage and abuse within the home. Continuous efforts are made to strengthen existing community-based protection mechanisms, such as Refugee Child and Women Committees, and Refugee Education Committees. These committees conduct regular activities, which include community-based advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns and focus group discussions on child-specific issues, targeting community members, teachers and parent groups.

In Libya, UNHCR engages regularly with members of the refugee communities to identify and strengthen support

mechanisms for unaccompanied children, including alternative care arrangements for children and assistance with locating lost family members.

In Mauritania, UNHCR is reinforcing the established community protection network and training its members on core child protection principles. Comprised of young refugee women and men, the community protection network complements child protection monitoring by identifying and referring children with protection needs to UNHCR and partners, while also undertaking prevention and community-sensitization activities. UNHCR's community mobilization efforts also address specific issues such as education, health, early marriage, and targeted outreach to men and boys to address harmful practices.

In Algeria, children in mixed migration flows remain at risk of trafficking and other abuses. UNHCR is building the capacity of refugee communities to serve as child protection actors by organizing train-the-trainer workshops on the vulnerability of refugee children and other migrants to human trafficking. These efforts are complemented by the development of standard operating procedures to help identify individuals at risk of trafficking, which will be used by community-based protection actors.

In Turkey, UNHCR focuses on raising awareness among refugees with regard to the national child protection

framework, referral mechanisms, and child rights. UNHCR also supports community centres, child-friendly spaces, and participatory and community-based interventions to harness the strengths of refugee communities as child protection actors.



Together with members of the SGBV and Child Protection



sub-working group in Jordan, UNHCR has developed a multi-media public interagency awareness campaign on child protection issues and SGBV, called “Amani”, meaning “My Safety”. The “Amani” campaign includes awareness-raising on the benefits of postponing marriage until adulthood.

In Egypt, UNHCR and UNICEF have established child-friendly spaces in Cairo, Alexandria, and Damietta that provide safe recreational areas to some 4,000 children from refugee and local communities. Similarly, the “Learn-Move-Play-Ground” project supports children from refugee and host communities in jointly designing and creating playgrounds at schools in high-need areas in Greater

Cairo. These efforts are complemented by the creation of Community Based Protection Networks to better respond to the child protection needs of a refugee community dispersed over a wide geographical area, along with community-based child protection committees comprised of community workers, social workers, and national NGO representatives and service providers.

In Yemen, the refugee community plays an essential role in the protection of children by participating in youth committees, the committee on persons with disabilities, the women’s committee, and the Alghaith Somali refugee association. Together, these committees identify and report instances of child abuse, support the enrolment and retention of refugee children in school, and help to identify foster care arrangements for unaccompanied children and other children at risk. They also focus on raising community awareness of child rights, harmful traditional practices, and the importance of education. UNHCR advocates for increased opportunities for refugee children to participate in decisions affecting their protection and well-being by including refugee girls and boys groups in peer support groups and peer counseling programmes, conducting participatory assessments with children and youth, supporting children members of the Yemeni children’s parliament, and supporting the development of youth committees.

## BRINGING QUALITY EDUCATION TO EVERY REFUGEE CHILD

Access to quality education is linked to increased literacy, income, and economic security over a child’s lifetime. For refugee children, in particular, enrolment in school serves as a critical source of protection by reducing exposure to early marriage, child labour, sexual exploitation, involvement in illicit activity, and other harms. Schools are also important places in which to identify children at risk of abuse, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), recruitment into armed groups—among other risks—and to connect them to appropriate services. Despite the vital role of education in securing the future and well-being of refugee children, considerable challenges remain, particularly with respect to Syrian refugee children.

Regionally, one of every two Syrian refugee children does not attend school. Countries in the region are striving to meet these needs, but their national systems, including in the education sector, are overwhelmed. In Jordan, 41 per cent of schools are now over-crowded, compared to 36 per cent in 2011. Several barriers remain, including

**“We lost everything. The only thing we don’t want to lose is education.”**  
**MOTHER OF 8,**  
 ZAATARI

teacher shortages, school-related expenses, the need for certification and accreditation, and concerns regarding the quality of education.

UNHCR’s education strategy hinges on enrolling more refugee children in formal education and, in the interim, non-formal education, while also ensuring that schools are safe spaces that reduce exposure to child protection

risks. UNHCR is working with the governments of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, as well as international organizations, UNICEF and other UN agencies and civil society partners to address the need for access to public education among refugee children, particularly those from Syria.

As a result of these efforts, 440,000 additional Syrian refugee children have been enrolled in school over the course of one year, with the percentage of Syrian refugee children not attending school dropping from 70 per cent to 49 per cent. Additionally, 118,000 Syrian refugee children and youth have participated in non-formal and informal education projects at the primary and secondary

needs each school year for the next three years. Moreover, in response to over-crowding, “double-shift schools” have been put in place in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq to accommodate Syrian refugee children.

UNHCR and partners are also working to increase access to education among refugee children in the broader region. In the first half of 2014, UNHCR supported over 137,000 refugee children in attending primary school, and 2,000 refugee children in attending secondary school. To support national

**ONE  
OUT OF  
TWO** SYRIAN  
REFUGEE  
CHILDREN  
DO NOT  
ATTEND  
SCHOOL



levels. During the first half of 2014, over 138,000 students in refugee-hosting countries in MENA received school supplies from UNHCR. The school feeding programme of the World Food Programme (WFP), was launched in camps in Jordan and Iraq in 2013 and has reached nearly 27,000 refugee children.

In Lebanon, the government launched the “Reaching All Children with Education” (“RACE”) initiative, which includes a commitment to educate over 400,000 Syrian refugee children and Lebanese children with specific

educational systems in meeting the additional needs posed by large refugee influxes, UNHCR also rehabilitated 47 schools and provided training to over 600 teachers.

In Saudi Arabia, Syrian refugee children are admitted to public schools, irrespective of their residency status. In Mauritania, UNHCR and its civil society partners provide educational grants to help refugee children enroll in public and private schools, resulting in 93 per cent enrolment of refugee children in primary school. In the broader region, UNHCR provided 194 scholarships for

tertiary education in the first six months of 2014 as well as language courses for 700 refugee children, to support their integration within schools and the communities in which they live.

In Algeria, UNHCR has successfully advocated for the inclusion of refugee children in national education systems, but challenges remain for children arriving mid-year who have difficulty integrating into classes. Recognizing that out-of-school refugee children in North Africa are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, UNHCR has partnered with CARITAS to offer “catch up” classes for refugee children to ensure they can re-enter school and to deter exposure to exploitative situations.

Similarly, UNHCR has carried out extensive advocacy with the Ministry of Education in Libya to provide free access to public education for refugee children. In Yemen, targeted humanitarian assistance for women and children allowed for the establishment of education projects in the Kharaz refugee camp, as well as for refugee children living in the urban areas of Sana’a and Aden. UNHCR supports youth literacy programmes for refugees and members of local communities, as well as the public kindergarten in Basateen-Aden which serves children from both refugee and local communities. In Tunisia, public schools are open to all children, including refugees, without discrimination. Refugee children and adolescents in Tunisia also have access to vocational training, with UNHCR’s support.

## GIVING EVERY REFUGEE CHILD A LEGAL IDENTITY: BIRTH REGISTRATION

For refugee children, a birth certificate furnishes proof of the child’s legal identity and facilitates enjoyment of basic rights, such as education, health care and freedom of movement. It also provides evidence of parentage and place of birth and, thus, nationality at birth.

|          |        |      |          |         |         |        |
|----------|--------|------|----------|---------|---------|--------|
| MOHAMMED |        |      | ABDULLAH | HUSSEIN | MAHMOUD | ?      |
| AHMAD    |        |      | KHALED   | IBRAHIM | MUSTAFA | FATIMA |
| ALI      | HASSAN | OMAR | AYA      | ALAA    | ALHABIB | MOUSSA |
|          |        |      | MARIAM   | ABDUL   | MALAK   | ?      |
|          |        |      | HALA     | ?       | RAHAF   | ISSA   |
|          |        |      | ?        | KHALAF  | YOUSSEF | HANNA  |

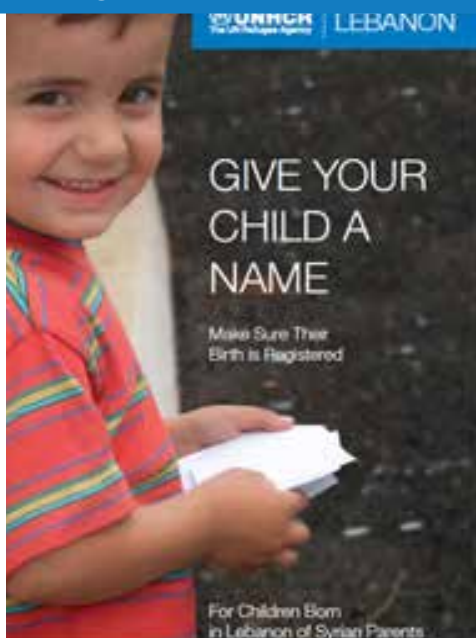
**A significant number of newborn Syrian refugee children do not have birth certificates.**

The failure to register a child’s birth creates immediate risks at the outset of its life. Unregistered children have no legal proof of parentage, which impedes family tracing and reunification for children separated by conflict or forced displacement. As unregistered children lack documents to prove their age and status as children, they are at increased risk of violations of their rights as they enter adolescence, including early marriage, child labor, recruitment into armed forces and groups, and prosecution as adults. Where non-registration ultimately results in statelessness, the consequences can be life-long and passed on to successive generations.

Fifty-one thousand Syrian children have been born in exile since the onset of the conflict in 2011. UNHCR continues to monitor the issuance of birth certificates to Syrian refugee children and has confirmed that a significant number has not been registered with the civil authorities. In most countries hosting Syrian refugees in the region, it is not possible to register a birth without an official marriage certificate. However, those fleeing the violence in Syria often arrive in host countries empty-handed, their documents lost or destroyed in transit.

Additional efforts are critical to address the lack of awareness among refugees regarding birth registration requirements and the complexity of the procedures currently in place. In Lebanon and Iraq, for instance, it

## Public Information Materials Explain the Procedures for Registering the Birth of a New Child.



is necessary to go to three different locations in order to register a birth, and documents proving identity and marriage are required.

In keeping with its global strategy on civil registration, UNHCR works with the authorities in States throughout MENA to reduce procedural barriers to birth registration, advocates for policies recognizing the right of all children to be registered at birth—irrespective of their status. UNHCR and partners also undertake campaigns to raise awareness among refugees on how to register new births. In Turkey, UNHCR is advocating for inclusion of provisions promoting birth registration in the regulations governing the temporary protection regime. In Mauritania, through its partner, Association pour la Lutte contre la Pauvreté et le Sous-Développement, UNHCR has successfully advocated for the issuance of birth certificates for refugee children born in the country.

With the goal of ensuring the registration of every refugee child, UNHCR is sensitizing local authorities and clarifying registration procedures with populations of concern throughout the region. Governments are also working with

UNHCR to develop more flexible approaches to registering new refugee births in their territory. In Lebanon, the Personal Status Directorate simplified procedures in May 2013 by accepting a single document, the family booklet, as proof of both parental identity and marriage. Mindful of the hardships refugees can face in travelling to government offices, the Government of Jordan has placed civil registry services and courts directly in refugee camps. In Yemen, UNHCR offers government registration centers with equipment and capacity-building initiatives to help facilitate the issuance of birth certificates to all refugee children born in Yemen in a timely manner.

In Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, UNHCR and partners have collectively distributed over 250,000 leaflets on birth registration procedures to refugees, and show daily animated films on birth registration to thousands at registration and community centres. Over 3,000 refugee families are counselled on birth registration every month in Lebanon alone, while UNHCR's Offices in Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon provide legal aid to help refugee families complete these procedures.

# SPECIALIZED SERVICES FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS

Children who are unaccompanied and separated, who are survivors of SGBV or trafficking, who are involved in harmful forms of child labour including recruitment into armed groups, who have disabilities, or who are in early marriages require special services on an urgent basis. UNHCR works directly and through partners to provide specialized child protection services to children experiencing various protection risks. In the first half of 2014, UNHCR and partners provided specialized child protection services to over 11,000 refugee children who had experienced violence, abuse, neglect or exploitation in the MENA region. Furthermore, over 28,000 refugee children in Jordan and Lebanon who are at risk of, or survivors of, gender-based violence have benefited from prevention or response services, including access to safe spaces. The availability, accessibility and quality of the specialized services have been significantly improved in 2014. In many countries, UNHCR has worked with partners to strengthen procedures and referral mechanisms outlining the relationship between national child protection systems and those established to serve refugee children.

## PROTECTING UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN

Children seeking safety in countries of asylum are at heightened risk of exploitation, abuse and other rights violations when separated from their parents or unaccompanied by adult family members and, thus, require specialized assistance.

The causes for separation from parents or caregivers differ among refugee children, with girls and boys facing gender-specific pressures and protection risks.

**MORE THAN  
8,000** SYRIAN REFUGEE  
CHILDREN ARE EITHER  
UNACCOMPANIED OR  
SEPERATED FROM THEIR  
FAMILY MEMEBERS

Boys report fleeing Syria without their parents to avoid conscription into armed groups and seeking employment to help support their families financially. Girls report fleeing without their parents in order to escape threats of

sexual violence and other protection risks in Syria. A high number of unaccompanied or separated children may travel alongside adults in mixed migratory movements and use dangerous routes that increase their risk of being sold, trafficked, sexually or economically exploited, or enslaved. Not all of them reach their destinations in safety – or at all.

In 2013, UNHCR launched “Live, Learn, Play Safe 2014-2016”, a regional initiative covering Egypt, Yemen, Sudan and Ethiopia, which aims to address the challenges related to secondary movement in these four operations. The inter-agency child protection response emphasizes the need to identify unaccompanied and separated children in a timely manner, assess the extent of family separation and the situation of affected children, conduct best interests assessments for each child, and promote family reunification through tracing and verification. Moreover, UNHCR focuses on preserving family unity at all stages of displacement, which includes avoiding the separation of children from their families at the border, as well as cases of secondary separation after arrival in the country of asylum. Where family reunification is not possible, UNHCR seeks appropriate, family-based alternative care arrangements, in line with the child’s best interests.

As a result of refugee movement patterns and the efforts of all partners in Jordan, for instance, there has been a significant increase in the reunification of unaccompanied children with their family members, with 89 per cent of unaccompanied children reunified with family members in the first half of 2014. Also in the first half of 2014, UNHCR and partners conducted more than 4,114 best interests assessments for refugee children, the vast majority of which were Syrian.

## PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO EARLY MARRIAGE

Protection from early marriage is central to promoting the safety, development, and well-being of children and, especially, girls. Girls who marry before they turn 18 years old are less likely to remain in school and more likely to experience domestic violence. Young teenage girls are more likely to die due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth than women in their twenties, and their infants are more likely to be stillborn or to die in the first month of

## Screenshot from a video scripted and illustrated by Syrian refugee girls to help prevent early marriage.



life. Conversely, girls whose education is not interrupted due to underage marriage are shown to experience significant gains in health, literacy and economic security and are more likely to prioritize the formal education of their own children.

Early marriage is an issue facing various refugee populations in MENA but which has been most pronounced during the Syrian refugee crisis. The conflict and the resulting displacement, increased poverty, fears of sexual violence and harassment, and uncertainty about the future have increased the prevalence of early marriage among girls in particular. Abusive home environments may create additional pressures for adolescent girls to enter into early marriages, which may be seen as a means to escape violence within the home. Notably, a 2014 UNICEF study found that all female survey respondents who had married below the age of 18 years did not want their own daughters to marry at an early age.

In Lebanon, 18 per cent of surveyed female youth aged 15 to 18 years were married and, in Jordan, the proportion of registered marriages involving Syrian children rose from 18 to 25 per cent between 2012 and 2013. Of these, 48 per cent involved marriages between Syrian girls and husbands who were 10 or more years older than them. In Turkey, some 4.5 per cent of refugee children are married.

Further complications may arise when the marriage cannot be legally registered because the parties to the marriage are below the minimum age permitted by law. This can further erode the legal and social security of the girls concerned by jeopardizing their rights to alimony, inheritance, and – in certain circumstances – child custody. Furthermore, the lack of a valid marriage certificate is an impediment to register a new birth.

UNHCR's over-arching approach to early marriage emphasizes prevention, identification and mitigation of the associated harms, and the provision of specialized child protection services, including psychosocial support, to girls at risk. The strategy for prevention includes a broad range of activities, such as challenging social norms condoning the practice, improving access to, and retention in, schools for refugee girls, reducing the socio-economic vulnerability of families, and engaging men and boys through awareness-raising activities.

Active engagement with the government is also a key component of the response. In Jordan, for example, UNHCR and UNICEF organized a Roundtable on Early Marriage in 2014 for relevant ministries and parliamentarians as well as humanitarian agencies to strengthen legal protection for girls at risk of early marriage. UNHCR is also working in collaboration with Jordan's Ministry of Justice to support the establishment of a Shari'a Court in the main refugee camp at Zaatari to increase access of refugees to safe and legal marriage procedures. The response in Jordan includes an Early and Forced Marriage Task Force, co-chaired by UNHCR and UNICEF and dedicated to mapping and analyzing the prevalence and causes of the practice, formulating policy responses, and providing technical advice to agencies working on the issue.

UNHCR and partners have also launched the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBV-IMS) in Jordan to systematically record reported SGBV incidents, including early marriage, in a safe and confidential manner that allows for the identification of trends and gaps with a view to improved planning and programming.

In Jordan and Lebanon, UNHCR also utilizes individual registration with UNHCR to counsel girls and families on the risks associated with early marriage. In many cases, these interventions have resulted in the cancellation of marriage plans or their postponement until the girls concerned reach adulthood. The core elements of the response are also found in operations in the broader region, such as Mauritania, where UNHCR and its civil society partners provide medical, psychosocial, legal and material assistance to girls in early marriages.

UNHCR also engages refugee communities as key partners in the response to early marriage. In Mauritania, this includes working with men and boys to challenge cultural norms that support or justify the practice. In Jordan, community dialogues highlighted the need to engage constructively with fathers, who were more likely to view early marriage as a means to better protect their daughters from sexual harassment and poverty.

Conversely, these dialogues revealed that women and girls were more likely to be skeptical of the practice, particularly in relation to their desire to complete their educations. In Lebanon, UNHCR and partners are also reaching out to religious leaders to raise awareness of the health risks and other harms associated with early marriage, with several religious leaders incorporating prevention messages in their regular sermons as a result. Similarly, in Algeria, UNHCR uses registration and monitoring of school attendance to identify instances of early marriage and provides support and assistance to the girls and boys identified.

### PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM CHILD LABOUR

Refugee children are particularly at risk of child labour, especially the worst forms. Contributing factors include the economic insecurity of refugee families, the lack of educational opportunities for refugee children, and social norms that condone the practice. While refugee girls and boys are both at risk of involvement in the worst forms of labour, the nature of the work performed and the associated protection risks often correlate to their gender. A joint assessment by UNICEF and Save the Children, conducted in April 2013, found that 44 per cent of school-aged Syrian refugee children in the Jordan Valley were working.

Identifying working children can be a challenge due to the dispersal of refugee populations in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas and also because many children may work intermittently, picking up jobs that change on a daily basis.

States in MENA have universally ratified the ILO Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which defines the “worst forms of child labour” as all forms of slavery, the recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, sexual exploitation, illicit activities, and work which is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

**1.7 MORE THAN  
MILLION**

SYRIAN REFUGEE  
RECEIVED IN-KIND,  
CASH OR VOUCHER TO  
MEET FOOD NEEDS

UNHCR's strategy seeks to address the root causes of child labour, such as poverty, social attitudes condoning the practice, and the demand from economic sectors where child labour is especially prevalent. Activities to mitigate poverty include vocational training, literacy



and life-skills programming, and the provision of cash assistance, food vouchers, and core relief items to economically vulnerable refugee families. UNHCR also works to strengthen the legal framework related to protecting children from exposure to the worst forms of child labour in particular.

In Lebanon, UNHCR and partners are working with the Government to promote the inclusion of refugee children in the national action plan on child labor, and UNHCR operations in the broader region are working closely with communities and families to raise awareness of the harms associated with child labour, while promoting school enrolment and retention. In Egypt, this includes providing educational grants to 25,000 refugee students for the 2014-2015 academic year.

In Jordan, community dialogues with refugee boys and their families resulted in greater awareness of child rights and the risks associated with some of the most dangerous forms of labour. Refugee children also noted the importance of trying to continue their schooling, even if they cannot stop working. In Jordan, services provided to refugee children involved in child labour include counselling on their rights, the risks associated with child labour, and referral to multi-sectoral services, such as health, education, and psychosocial support, as appropriate.

UNHCR and partners have also sought to mitigate socio-economic vulnerabilities through the provision of cash assistance to refugees with specific needs. In addition,

the percentage of out-of-school Syrian refugee children in MENA was successfully reduced from 70 per cent in August 2013 to 49 per cent in July 2014, with the most notable progress in Jordan and Egypt.

UNHCR and partners prevent and respond to child recruitment in armed forces and armed groups through a number of activities. These include raising awareness of the risks of participating in conflict, counselling children and families on safe alternatives to participating in conflict, and working with authorities to monitor the arrival and returns of unaccompanied children in order to limit the risks of recruitment.

UNHCR also participates in the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on grave violations of children's rights in situations of armed conflict, which includes monitoring the recruitment or use of children by armed forces or armed groups. Once identified, children who have been recruited are referred to confidential specialized services.

### PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

In certain sub-regions of MENA, a high number of refugee

children may travel alongside adults in mixed migratory movements and use dangerous routes. These factors expose them to risks of being sold, trafficked, sexually or economically exploited, or enslaved. These risks escalate when the children in question are separated from their parents or unaccompanied by adult family members acting as guardians.

Reports show that refugee children attempting journeys from the Horn of Africa to Saudi Arabia via Yemen face serious risks of trafficking and exploitation— with girls sometimes forced into “marriage” and otherwise subject to sexual violence and exploitation by older men during the journey.

Gaps in birth registration can also contribute to children found in mixed migratory movements and falling prey to traffickers. As unregistered children are generally unable to travel through formal channels, they are vulnerable to smugglers offering the only possible means of escaping persecution or reuniting with family abroad. Evidence reveals that traffickers, and other criminal elements preying upon children, seek children who are unregistered and undocumented because they can “vanish without a trace.” Indeed, even where a child trafficked abroad is successfully located, family reunification can be hampered if there is no official record of the child in a country's civil registry. UNHCR's work to promote the civil registration of all refugee births in the region is also an important protective measure, as refugee children become more at risk of human trafficking if they lack birth certificates and travel documents.

In line with UNHCR's Global Initiative on Protection at Sea, UNHCR's operations in Yemen and North Africa are striving to establish protection-sensitive responses to mixed migratory movements. UNHCR also prioritizes the establishment of child-appropriate reception facilities and alternatives to detention, identifying persons in need of international protection, including those with specific needs, and providing them with appropriate services. As previously mentioned, UNHCR also promotes regional cooperation frameworks, such as its regional initiative launched in 2013 to monitor and respond to dangerous secondary movements, especially by children, in Egypt and Yemen.

To foster more effective identification, UNHCR is supporting the capacity of government-led registration teams in Yemen to identify trafficking victims and better understand the routes of mixed migratory movements. UNHCR working with the government of Yemen, IOM, UNICEF, and civil society organizations to enhance coordination. In Tunisia, the Office has worked with the government to identify refugee children in dangerous

**The Society for Humanitarian Solidarity (SHS), won the 2012 Nansen Refugee Award for its life-saving work rescuing refugees and migrants in Yemen.**



onward movements through the country, and to identify appropriate alternatives to detention—such as housing in a youth center—while expediting refugee status determination and assisting the children accordingly.

This progress notwithstanding, greater systemization is required to ensure consistent and prompt screening of vulnerable children engaged in mixed migratory movements to identify and respond to possible international protection needs.

In Morocco, UNHCR and partners are providing psychosocial services to survivors of trafficking, while seeking to identify appropriate shelter facilities in lieu of detention, and to better address their protection needs. In Mauritania, UNHCR is working with a civil society partner, the Association pour la Lutte contre la Pauvreté et le Sous-Développement, to establish a system for identifying refugee children at risk of human trafficking or onward dangerous movements.

In 2009, Algeria amended its penal code to enhance criminal penalties for human traffickers. While an important measure, the law does not address the need for services and support to trafficking victims. UNHCR has therefore redoubled its efforts to identify victims of trafficking who may fall under its mandate and prioritized the determination of their refugee status. UNHCR also facilitated joint discussions with the Algerian immigration authorities, the Italian Committee for Refugees, and Algeria's Consultative Commission for the Protection and the Promotion of Human Rights to examine protection-sensitive approaches to migration management.

## PROTECTING CHILDREN AT RISK OF DETENTION

In 2012, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlighted that it is never in the best interests of the child to be subject to detention solely due to their immigration status, or that of their parents. This year, UNHCR launched its 2014-2019 global strategy, entitled "Beyond Detention". The strategy establishes three overarching goals: end the detention of children; establish alternatives to detention; and ensure, where detention is necessary and unavoidable, that conditions are in line with international standards.

In keeping with these goals, UNHCR operations in the MENA region support States in developing child-sensitive asylum laws and migration policies that avoid the use of immigration detention. UNHCR also works with government, UN and civil society partners in operations throughout MENA to promote alternatives to detention wherever possible, monitor detention facilities, and

identify children of concern in custody, assess their needs and prepare appropriate interventions. Where the detention of children cannot be avoided, UNHCR advocates for adherence to international standards, ensuring, for example, that the period of confinement is no longer than necessary, specific facilities for juveniles are available and separate from those with adults, and national child protection bodies are assured uninhibited access for regular monitoring. However, given the prevalence of child labour and migratory movements, refugee children continue to face risks of being detained. In response, UNHCR regularly advocates for alternatives to immigration detention for children of concern. In Libya, for instance, UNHCR identifies children and other vulnerable individuals in detention through routine detention monitoring, provides them with medical and other critical assistance, and advocates for their immediate release.

States in the Gulf sub-region work closely with the UNHCR Regional Representation in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and request its assistance in determining whether children in custody may be in need of international protection. Once it determines that a child is of concern to UNHCR, the Office expedites the identification of appropriate durable solutions.

# CONCLUSIONS

UNHCR, together with government, UNICEF, UNFPA and other UN and civil society partners continues to put the protection of children at the forefront of the response to refugee crises in the region. UNHCR is committed to working in partnership with government and other actors to strengthen national, comprehensive child protection systems that serve all children, including refugees.

Children, families and other community members have a crucial role to play in preventing violence, both by reinforcing community-based protection mechanisms and in challenging harmful norms and practices that condone violence, abuse and the exploitation of children. Communities are also central in responding to the needs of child survivors of violence. The importance of promoting children's participation in their own protection cannot be overstated. Supporting advocates, including

youth and adolescents, who work for positive change within refugee and local communities is, therefore, a key strategy of UNHCR's child protection response.

UNHCR will also continue to emphasize the availability and accessibility of appropriate specialized services for all refugee children facing protection risks. This includes ensuring that services such as specialized child protection services, family tracing and reunification, and foster care placement are available, and that staff working with children are well-trained and provided with tools to undertake this sensitive and crucial work. With the increasing number of refugee children, their resilience, determination and aspirations give hope for the future. Although significant progress has been made, the challenges remain daunting and much work is still needed to protect refugee children in MENA.

To enhance the protection of refugee children in MENA, the actions outlined below are recommended.

- ***Ensure refugee children have access to international protection.***
- ***Strengthen procedures to ensure that the best interests of the child and the child's views are central considerations in all matters affecting their well-being and their future.***
- ***Register and document every refugee child immediately after birth, without discrimination.***
- ***Strengthen procedures and services to promote children's right to family unity and respond to the needs of separated and unaccompanied children.***
- ***Provide all refugee children equal access to quality education in a safe learning environment supportive of their developmental needs.***
- ***Invest in national child protection systems to strengthen their quality and capacity to protect refugee children.***
- ***Support programmes that provide specialized child protection services to refugees and other children of concern.***
- ***Support children, families and communities to better protect children.***
- ***Work in partnership to advocate for increased resources for all child protection actors, especially States.***
- ***Invest in improved knowledge and data on child protection issues and effective responses.***

# ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Unaccompanied and Separated Syrian Children in Jordan: A Trend Analysis 2014, UNICEF Jordan.

<sup>2</sup>UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR Global Trends 2013: War's Human Cost, 20 June 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53a3df694.html>.

<sup>3</sup>All statistics in this report refer to refugees that are of concern under UNHCR's mandate. The MENA countries that are covered in this report are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Western Sahara and Yemen.

<sup>4</sup>Due to the rapidly evolving situation, these statistics are subject to change from the time of this document's publication.

<sup>5</sup>See UN General Assembly, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, 25 May 2000, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/47fdfb180.html>; UN General Assembly, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, 16 March 2001, A/RES/54/263, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38bc.html>.

<sup>6</sup>In the MENA region, States parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention include Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen. Djibouti, Turkey, and Somalia are also States parties.

<sup>7</sup>UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Conclusion on Children at Risk, 05 October 2007, No. 107 (LVIII) - 2007, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/471897232.html>.

<sup>8</sup>In line with the 2006 guidance of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, this framework calls for three over-arching approaches, namely: 1) the review of kinship care arrangements for separated children and the formalization of these arrangements in law when they are found to be consistent with the best interests of the child; 2) the formalization of spontaneous fostering arrangements after these situations are confirmed to be in the best interests of the child; and 3) the placement of refugee children with guardians outside their families when necessary to address protection concerns, including possible neglect, exploitation or abuse. See UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), CRC General Comment No. 6 (2005): Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children Outside their Country of Origin, 01 September 2005, at a para. 12, CRC/GC/2005/6, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/42dd174b4.html>.

<sup>9</sup>The "No Lost Generation" campaign ("NLG") was initially launched in September 2013 at the United Nations General Assembly by UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children, World Vision and other partners. The "NLG" campaign has grown considerably since its inception, with many additional partners in various sectors joining the initiative.

<sup>10</sup>UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis, November 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/529c3b4d4.html>.

<sup>11</sup>UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Woman Alone: The fight for survival by Syria's refugee women, 2 July 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/53be84aa4.html>.

<sup>12</sup>Unaccompanied and Separated Syrian Children in Jordan: A Trend Analysis 2014, UNICEF Jordan.

<sup>13</sup>Situation Analysis of Youth in Lebanon, 2014.

<sup>14</sup>UNICEF Jordan: "A study on early marriage in Jordan", 2014.

<sup>15</sup>RRP6 MYR, July 2014.

<sup>16</sup>Save the Children Jordan and United Nations Children's Fund, "Comprehensive Outreach to Syrians in Ghor and Irbid on Educational Needs", Jordan, April 2013, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup>UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Committee on the Rights of the Child, Report of the 2012 Day of General Discussion on the Rights of All Children in the Context of International Migration, 28 September 2012, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/51efb6fa4.html>.

<sup>18</sup>UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Beyond Detention: A Global Strategy to support governments to end the detention of asylum-seeker and refugees, 2014-2018, 2014, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/536b564d4.html>.



